PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 70

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1984-85

COMPRISING PERIOD
17 DECEMBER 1984—11 JANUARY 1985

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IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 70**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1984-85

House of Commons

Monday 17 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

1. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the strike by some miners.

3. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest situation in the coal industry dispute.

5. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the dispute in the coal industry.

6. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on recent events relating to the coal industry dispute.

8. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coal industry dispute.

10. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the current situation in the coal mining industry.

11. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coal dispute.

16. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the coal strike.

18. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the mining industry dispute.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): Of the 174 pits, there are now 148 with men present and 66 of these are producing coal. Coal production is at its highest level since the dispute started. Since 5 November more than 16,500 miners who were on strike have reported for work. Coal stocks at the power stations remain at a similar level to what they were in August.

At a meeting with representatives of the Trades Union Congress last Friday, I expressed the Government's regret that the compromise proposal put forward by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, and the detailed agreement reached with NACODS, had not provided proposals acceptable to the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers. With two of the three mining unions not on strike, and with the one third of the NUM which had a ballot voting overwhelmingly against strike action, the Government regret that the two thirds of the NUM continuing on strike have been deprived of the opportunity to express their views through a national ballot.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the encouraging news about the number of men who are working and the number of pits that are remaining open. In view of his slightly alarming remarks last weekend about being available for further discussions, will he assure the House and the working miners that further talks between the NUM and the National Coal Board will not take place until there is genuine evidence of a fundamental shift in the attitude of the NUM to uneconomic pits?

Mr. Walker: I have told the TUC and the mining unions that I am willing to have talks with union leaders or the TUC at any time. That is the correct position for me to take. In my talks with the TUC I made it clear that it would be impossible to end the dispute so long as there was a totally unreasonable demand that every pit, no matter how uneconomic, should be kept open until the last ton of coal was extracted. That is the reality of the scene.

Mr. Davies: Notwithstanding those figures, does the Secretary of State accept that in parts of the mining industry the strike is solid and there is no prospect of breaking it? In view of that fact and the increasing doubt being cast over the Government's accountancy figures, most recently by the London Business School, does the Secretary of State appreciate that there must be negotiations? Would it not be helpful if he instructed Mr. MacGregor to withdraw his weekend statement about preconditions and took the necessary steps to get the parties involved back round the negotiating table?

Mr. Walker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that there have been seven rounds of negotiations. In the one at ACAS, ACAS came forward with a compromise proposal. At the end of seven rounds of negotiations Mr. Scargill is constantly on record as saying that he has not moved his position since 6 March. If the hon. Gentleman wants a settlement to the dispute, he should put pressure on Mr. Scargill.

Mr. Hamilton: Since it is clear day by day that there can be no winners and no losers in the contest—we are all losers, including the miners—will the Secretary of State take an initiative and agree to call together all those involved in the dispute so long as they undertake, before they start discussions, that there will be flexibility on all sides?

Mr. Walker: My difficulty in replying to that question is that in July one side suggested a range of new proposals which showed considerable flexibility, and, at the behest of another miners' union, went to ACAS and agreed a compromise proposal. On Friday the TUC told me that negotiations must take place between the two parties concerned. Until the one party which has refused to move since 6 March moves, there will not be the negotiated settlement which we all want.

Mr. Chapman: Regretting the intransigence of Mr. Scargill, but recognising that some striking miners understandably fear that there will be no other employment in the mining communities, may I ask my right hon. Friend to report progress on NCB (Enterprise) Ltd., which was set up to encourage alternative industries in uneconomic mining areas?

Mr. Walker: As I reported to the House, the company was set up with an initial capital of £5 million. Immediately there were a substantial number of inquiries and applications, and I agreed to double the capital of the company. I have informed the National Coal Board that the Government would be happy to finance an extension of its activities so that that important work can be carried out.

Mr. Strang: Why does the Secretary of State not facilitate negotiations without preconditions between the NCB and the NUM? Is it not clear that the Government are more concerned to inflict a defeat on the NUM, as part of their assault on the trade union movement, than to secure a negotiated settlement in the interests of the mining industry? How much damage will be done to the economic and social fabric of the country before the Government recognise that the vast majority of miners will return to work only after a negotiated settlement?

Mr. Walker: The tone of the hon. Gentleman's remarks is very different from the tone of the remarks that I heard in my talks with the TUC on Friday. There have been seven rounds of negotiations without preconditions, one under the auspices of ACAS, which came forward with a compromise proposal. I have heard no criticism of that compromise proposal by the TUC or the Labour party, and it is time that they tried to persuade Mr. Scargill to accept it.

Mr. Proctor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real long-term damage to the coal mining industry has been caused during this dispute by the closure of coal faces in economic pits and the loss of contracts to the industry? Will my right hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Walker: It is true that 23 producing faces have been lost during the dispute, which is a tragic loss to the industry. As my hon. Friend knows, we were conducting an active and successful campaign to persuade industries to convert to coal. I had hoped that 1,000 firms would convert to coal this year, but the entire campaign has been destroyed by the dispute.

Mr. Hannam: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the dispute is rapidly becoming more concerned with the future of the president of the National Union of Mineworkers than of the coal miners? Will he commiserate with the TUC, which must negotiate on behalf of a union which refuses to budge an inch towards a settlement?

Mr. Walker : I understand the diverse problems of the TUC. From my talks last week and my communications with the TUC, I am sure that it is anxious that the dispute should end with a negotiated settlement as speedily as possible. I told the trade union leaders who attended the talks on Friday that almost no other British trade union has an offer available to it as generous as the offer available to the miners.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Secretary of State agree that the only people who will change the views of the leadership of the NUM are the members of the union and its executive? What plans does he have for discussions with the TUC and others, and what public action will he take to persuade those members of the union and of the executive to try to bring about that change?

Mr. Walker: I am sure that the 16,500 union members who have returned to work since 5 November are having an impact on thinking.

Mr. Knox: Apart from our foreign competitors, can my right hon. Friend think of anyone who has benefited from the strike?

Mr. Walker: No, Sir.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Secretary of State accept that, for the first time during the dispute, he has gone a little way towards meeting trade unionists, which in a sense is welcome? If we accept that his view concurs with that of the TUC—that the only people who can settle the strike are the NCB and the NUM—what deters him from using his good offices to bring together those two parties in the foreseeable future? It is a mad strike, which must be resolved by sitting round the table, not by attrition.

Mr. Walker: I repeat that on several occasions the two sides have met, and on one occasion, under the auspices not of a Tory politician but ACAS, a compromise plan put forward by ACAS was rejected by the leadership of the

NUM. Likewise, the leadership of the NUM has always refused to put the terms on offer to the miners in a ballot. That is the manner in which it is operating.

Mr. Aitken: Will my right hon. Friend give special attention to the position in the Kent coalfield where, before the strike began, three pits were losing £25 million a year, which amounts to a subsidy of £10,000 a year from the taxpayer to each of the 2,500 miners? As the position has deteriorated still further, because of geological and other changes, and as every sensible person in the Kent community knows that we cannot go on for ever in the same lunatic uneconomic way as before, will my right hon. Friend give special priority to the idea of an imaginative scheme by NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. after this strike totters to its close?

Mr. Walker: I assure my hon. Friend that wherever there is a potential closure due to a pit becoming uneconomic and unable to contribute successfully to the future of the industry, the new enterprise company which has been created will deal with the problem. It will have the finance, the managerial advice and, frequently, accommodation and a whole range of services to enable fresh and new enterprises to come into such communities.

Mr. Benn: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that for over a year, since the overtime ban began, he has come to the House week after week and said that the strike is crumbling? Has that not been wholly false, and has not the information that he has given misled the House and the country and deceived himself? Is not his policy in a shambles, and is not the only conclusion that can be drawn from his refusal to encourage talks that he and the Cabinet wish the strike to continue, which is the conclusion that most miners have already drawn?

Mr. Walker: Fortunately, the conclusion that most miners have drawn about the right hon. Gentleman is that his rhetoric during the dispute is different from his record as Secretary of State.

Secondly, as to disputes crumbling——

Mr. Benn: Answer the question.

Mr. Walker: I shall.

As to disputes crumbling, I recall that the right hon. Gentleman told me that the movement of coal would stop in April, since when 25 million tonnes have been moved.

Mr. Rost: As the taxpayer has to pay the bills for this senseless strike, has he not the right to demand that the board should do what every other private and public enterprise would have had to do by now to contain its losses, which is to announce a deadline for a return to work, after which the generous guarantee of a job will no longer be valid? When will the board start to manage?

Mr. Walker: Coal is one of this country's most important resources. Coal has a good, sound and expanding future. I hope that the pressures of all those who are concerned with the future of the industry will ensure that we move back to the potentiality of high investment and good production. I should not want to do anything to damage that prospect.

Mr. Hardy: The Secretary of State mentioned my association, NACODS. Does he accept that the agreement appears to have considerable fragility about it as a result of actions by the NCB? Does he further accept that that suggests that the chairman of the NCB should no longer be allowed to occupy his office, not least because of the pessimistic statement that he made at the very time when the Secretary of State was meeting the trade unions last week? Is it not time for the right hon. Gentleman to take a further initiative to achieve a negotiated settlement, and should he not suggest to Mr. MacGregor that the time has come when there should be an end to the visits to Hobart house of furtive emissaries from the Conservative party?

Mr. Walker: The chairman of the NCB has been through seven rounds of negotiations. He has been to ACAS and accepted its compromise proposal, and he has negotiated with NACODS in great detail and reached a settlement. Therefore, nobody can accuse him of inflexibility. As to being pessimistic, on all seven occasions the chairman has been opposed by somebody whose one boast is that he has not moved since 6 March.

Mr. Gale: Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that the precondition to the negotiations having been laid down by the president of the National Union of Mineworkers, contrary to the impression that the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress sought to give on Radio 4 this morning, the union has not moved from the start of the strike from its entrenched position? Will my right hon. Friend undertake that there will be no further negotiations until and unless the NUM moves from that entrenched position?

Mr. Walker: The basic demand that every pit, no matter how uneconomic, must be kept going until all coal is exhausted unless there are safety or geological reasons for doing otherwise has never been made by any NUM leader in the past and, as far as I know, has never been made in any other coal industry. It is not just an absurd demand. It would do permanent damage to the coal industry if it were met.

Mr. Wallace: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's meeting with the TUC, but I wonder whether the background of the talks was helped by the Government taking £1 off supplementary benefit. Is it wise, for the atmosphere of future talks, for the Government to proceed with their announced intention to strip miners of housing benefit if they are paying rent?

Mr. Walker: Certain advice has been given in NUM magazines about how to obtain additional money from social security. If the hon. Gentleman is interested, he should study that advice. It was given positively on the basis not of what were basic needs but of how to organise these matters.

Mr. Orme: If the tone of the meeting with the TUC was as good as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, why did he not respond to the TUC? The congress put forward positive proposals. The right hon. Gentleman will know that, according to the accountancy report and that of the London Business School, the basis of uneconomic pits has been challenged. Therefore, there is a basis on which to resume talks. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not play a role in seeing that those talks are held, instead of waiting another three or four weeks before anything happens?

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman asks why I did not respond. The TUC did not come to the meeting on that basis. It started the talks, quite correctly, by saying that it was not in a position to negotiate. We exchanged views on its suggestions. The TUC's problem, as Mr. Willis said afterwards, was that it did not consider that anyone could

back down before the negotiations and therefore that it was wrong to suggest that the NUM should move from its position before negotiations began. I had to point out to the TUC representatives that there had been seven rounds of negotiations and that Mr. Scargill had not backed down on any.

Gas Prices

2. **Mr. Malone** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the Government's current policy on gas pricing.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith): Gas prices are determined by the British Gas Corporation, taking into account the need to achieve an adequate return on capital, and to obtain an adequate and continuing supply of gas.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Can he confirm that it is Government policy to ensure that gas is provided to the consumer at the most competitive prices? In addition, will he undertake that in the event of gas prices perhaps falling, as a result of increased efficiency on the part of the British Gas Corporation, prices will reach the consumer unaltered and that there will be no interference to put them up?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Pricing is the responsibility of the British Gas Corporation. We expect the corporation to be competitive. I hope my hon. Friend welcomes the fact that, under its financial targets and performance aims up to 1986-87, it is expected to achieve a reduction in unit net trading costs in real terms of 12 per cent. compared with 1982-83. There is strong pressure on the British Gas Corporation to be efficient, and I am sure that it will be.

Mr. Rowlands: As future gas prices and supplies may be determined by the decisions to go ahead with the Sleipner contract, will the Minister say what is the Government's position on it? As I understand it, negotiations are virtually complete between the British Gas Corporation and its opposite number. Where do the Government stand on the Sleipner contract?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The Sleipner negotiation is not confined to the British Gas Corporation and the Norwegian company Statoil. There are a number of other big financial considerations which affect the future of gas supplies to the United Kingdom and our balance of payments. Negotiations continue on those issues. Until they are concluded, I regret that it is not possible to answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

NCB Property (Vandalism)

4. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, when he next meets the chairman of the National Coal Board, he will discuss the incidence of vandalism against National Coal Board property and the resulting financial cost to the board.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I deplore the malicious acts of vandalism which have been carried out against NCB property during the present strike. They can only damage further the prospects for the industry.

Mr. Merchant: In view of the serious acts of vandalism which have taken place in many areas, including Easington colliery, near my constituency, where a few weeks ago windows were broken and cars overturned, will my hon. Friend consider encouraging the chairman of the NCB to institute disciplinary proceedings against those miners found guilty of such offences?

Mr. Hunt: Since the beginning of the dispute about 450 employees have been dimissed by the NCB. These include a significant number for offences associated with vandalism. There can be no possible excuse for causing wilful damage to an industry which, at the start of this pointless strike, had such great potential for the future.

Mr. Allen McKay: When the Minister meets the chairman of the NCB to discuss vandalism, will he suggest to him that as, after seven meetings, he has found himself incapable of bringing the strike to a successful conclusion it is time that he went?

Mr. Hunt: As my right hon. Friend has already pointed out, in the course of the dispute there has been just one conciliation proposal from ACAS. After careful consideration, that was accepted by the chairman of the NCB but rejected by the president of the NUM.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Is it not a fact that of all the many speeches that Arthur Scargill has made, he has not made one statement urging his members not to vandalise their own plant and tools, because, when they go back to work, any such damage will be to their detriment?

Mr. Hunt: The strike has been characterised by most unhelpful remarks from the president of the NUM. Perhaps the most unhelpful came today. Hon. Members may have noticed that he now calls for all forms of industrial action on a massive scale in support of the miners. I am certain that he will receive the same sort of raspberry to that ridiculous irresponsible notion as he has throughout the dispute.

Mr. Dormand: Is it not strange that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) should refer to my constituency, Easington, as being near to his, when it is not, and is it not even more strange that he should refer to an incident which took place five months ago? Will he join me in my constituency to see the whole context of what has happened?

Mr. Hunt: The real damage in the dispute and the real financial cost has been, for instance, in the tragic investment situation. It now looks as if the industrial action, if it continues till the end of March, will mean a reduction in investment spending of nearly £500 million.

Mr. Adley: Just for once, would it not be wonderful to hear one Labour Member stand up and unequivocally deplore vandalism?

Mr. Hunt: I believe and hope that I am speaking for the House in condemning without reservation the sort of vandalism that we have seen.

Mr. Eadie: If and when the Secretary of State meets the chairman of the NCB, will he ask him why he seems to come to life only when there is a move to try to resolve the miners' dispute? He must be about the most expensive chairman of any nationalised industry. Is it not vandalism for the chairman of the NCB to make statements on the eve of the Secretary of State's meeting with the TUC suggesting that there is no prospect of the strike ending? It must surely be unparalleled for a Cabinet Minister to

have his authority undermined in that way. Is it not time that Mr. MacGregor was asked to go? He has done too much damage already.

Mr. Hunt: The chairman of the NCB has made what is undoubtedly the most generous offer that the miners have had since nationalisation. It is interesting to note that not one hon. Member so far has said that it is not unreasonable for the president of the NUM to stick to the irresponsible demand that no pit, however uneconomic, should close while there is still an ounce of coal left in it.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

7. **Mr. Orme** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for the privatisation of British Nuclear Fuels.

Mr. Peter Walker: We have no plans at present to sell shares in British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Orme: I welcome that statement, but will the right hon. Gentleman tell the management of British Nuclear Fuels to stop talking publicly about privatisation, as that will only get the public's back up and do great damage?

Mr. Walker: I gather that in an interview with one particular journalist the chairman gave his views as to the potentiality of privatisation and implied that, with regard to the staff of British Nuclear Fuels, privatisation would be welcome. But he explained afterwards that he had expressed his own personal view.

Energy Efficiency Office

9. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office for the current year; what is its role in relation to the co-ordination of energy conservation policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Energy Efficiency Office's budget for 1984-85 is £18·6 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set up the office to spearhead the drive for greater energy efficiency in industry, commerce and the home. Considerable progress has already been made.

Mr. Cox: In view of that reply, will the Minister give an assurance that the Government's financial policies, including those on rate capping and so on, will not harm energy conservation programmes throughout the country? In view of the urgency of the matter, why is there still a division of responsibility as between the Department of Energy and the Department of the Environment? Why cannot everything come under one Department — preferably the Department of Energy?

Mr. Hunt: I assure the hon. Gentleman that every possible incentive is being given to local authorities—I have recently met a number of them—to spearhead the energy efficiency drive. It is a sign of confidence that the Government have increased the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office within the Department by 34 per cent. over the past year.

Mr. Boyes: How can the Minister talk about confidence in the Government when Cape Insulation in my constituency gave notice on 4 December to 360 or 370 men that the company would close on 21 December? Is it not a futile use of Government money to spend it on glossy brochures and leaflets when the Government are not allowing local authorities the finance to use those products and thus to keep people in work?

Mr. Hunt: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman about the very serious redundancies caused by the closure of Cape Industries in Washington, but for some time there has been over-capacity in that area of the market. With the increased advance in advertising and the "lift a finger" campaign already showing signs of tremendous success, I very much hope that we shall see an upsurge of activity in that sphere.

Mr. Wallace: How many local authorities have written to the Secretary of State in the past 12 months saying that they are having difficulty in planning and implementing energy conservation measures because of capital restrictions that are imposed on them by the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Hunt: There has been a tremendous amount of interest in the energy efficiency campaign on the part of local authorities. More than 250 local authorities have sought advice from the Energy Efficiency Office and are participating in the crescendo that we are now reaching in this important campaign.

Nuclear Power

13. **Mr. Skeet** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the prospects for nuclear power in the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): The Government attach considerable importance to the continuing safe and economic development of nuclear power.

Mr. Skeet: Does my hon. Friend agree that, after Sizewell, there does not appear to be a programme? Will he bear in mind the needs of the nuclear industry? Furthermore, will he take into account the fact that while 17 per cent. of total electricity is produced by nuclear means in the United Kingdom, the French, who are much more competitive, produce more than 50 per cent. of their total electricity from that source?

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend is correct in what he says about France. The Government consider that a prudent energy policy requires the country to have available a range of supply options, including an appropriate nuclear component. As my hon. Friend says, in 1983 nuclear power contributed 17 per cent. of the United Kingdom's electricity supply. When the three AGRs currently being commissioned are fully operational, nuclear power could be contributing as much as a quarter of our electricity requirements. Our nuclear generating capacity will then have risen from 6·5 to 9·5 GW.

The Government expect that nuclear power will form an increasing component of our electricity supply in the longer term, provided that nuclear stations can be built to time and cost. The number of new nuclear stations will depend on several factors, including the level of electricity demand.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not the future of the nuclear power industry very much dependent on its competitive position as against coal? Do the Government take note of the way in which the accounts of companies and organisations involved in the nuclear industry are

drawn up? If they do, how do they take note of those accounts? Do they take similar note of the National Coal Board accounts, with which the nuclear industry has to compete? Will the Minister ensure that the accounting procedures of both organisations are published openly so that we can all study them?

Mr. Goodlad: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. We have every confidence in the accountants concerned.

Coal Liquefaction

14. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of coal liquefaction.

Mr. David Hunt: The National Coal Board has completed the basic design work for its liquefaction project at Point of Ayr. I am delighted to be able now to announce that the Commission of the European Community has offered aid of £4·8 million. The board expects to begin work on the construction phase early in the new year.

Mr. Dormand: Does the Minister agree that liquefaction is most important for the future of the coal industry? Does he agree that the Government first used the excuse of lack of private capital for the slow development of coal liquefaction? Is the Minister now using the miners' strike as an excuse for even slower development? The Minister has said nothing about Government finance. Will he say something about it now?

Mr. Hunt: This Minister is well aware of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the subject. It is a vital subject. The National Coal Board is discussing terms of participation with a private sector company. Such participation is expected to release the £2·5 million balance of the Department's contribution, which has already been substantial in the design stage.

Mr. Eadie: Does the Minister realise that his Department has been fiddling around with the liquefaction scheme for five and a half years? At the end of that it seems that all we shall have will be a glorified laboratory scheme on a colliery site. Is it any wonder that our scientists are disillusioned with the Government's approach to science and technology?

Mr. Hunt: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The project is important. Completion of the NCB contract with the EEC will trigger the start of the construction phase work. That will go ahead with the Government's full support.

Electricity Prices

15. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the estimated increases in electricity prices to industry during the coming year.

Mr. Peter Walker: Electricity tariffs for industrial consumers are determined by the electricity supply industry. I understand that area boards will not be increasing tariffs this winter.

Mr. Baldry: I am delighted to hear that news, because industry needs to know well in advance, when it is budgeting, what prices might do in the coming year. Is my right hon. Friend aware that some industries have been worried that one of the effects of the damaging miner's strike will be to make them less competitive because electricty prices will go up?

Mr. Walker: I am aware of the importance to industry of keeping electricity prices as low as possible. That is the electricity industry's objective. I am pleased to say that electricity prices to industrial consumers have fallen on average by 8 per cent. in real terms in the last two years.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Secretary of State agree that he has wasted £4,400 million in the last 10 months attacking the National Union of Mineworkers and that a large part of that cost will fall on industries such as the electricity industry, resulting in price increases in the coming months or years? Will not old-age pensioners between the ages of 70 and 85, whose heating benefits have been cut, and the families of striking miners whose benefits have also been cut, have to bear the cost of the Government's attack on the miners and their families in the last 10 months? Yet again the people least able to bear the cost will have to bear it.

Mr. Walker: As I know of the hon. Gentleman's passion for looking after pensioners, I know that he will be doing all that he can to persuade Mr. Scargill to accept the very good terms available.

17. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the average electricity price charged to industrial customers in the United Kingdom; and what information he has on the comparable figure in France.

Mr. Goodlad: Electricity prices to industrial consumers vary greatly within all countries, according to the nature of the load being supplied. In general, however, French prices are the lowest in Europe and are, typically, up to 20 per cent. lower than those in the United Kingdom and other EEC states. This is largely due to the greater proportion of electricity generated by nuclear power in France.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As French electricity prices put British industry at a competitive disadvantage, which is bad for investment and jobs, will my hon. Friend explain some of the reasons for the price differential? Does he agree that the large French nuclear programme enables that country to generate electricity significantly more cheaply than we can manage?

Mr. Goodlad: Yes, Sir. My hon. Friend is correct.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that while European electricity suppliers may advertise certain tariffs through long-term agreements, they supply electricity at a much lower figure to many industrialists working in Europe? Is there not a massive subsidy to industry in Europe? Are there not many companies with bases in this country and Europe which obtain electricity at a cheaper rate by using that method to get around the advertised tariffs?

Mr. Goodlad: The French tariff is lower because, broadly speaking, it has a larger nuclear element. The electricity supply industry in Britain is currently considering proposals for successors to the present load management schemes, including the contracted consumer load scheme, which formally expires in March 1985. I

understand that the Electricity Council intends that the new arrangements should, overall, be no less beneficial than the present schemes.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Palace of Westminster (Bedrooms)

38. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Lord Privy Seal how many bedrooms there are in the Palace of Westminster today compared with 30 years ago; how they are allocated; and if he will make a statement.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): There are 42 bedrooms in the Palace of Westminster, which compares with 38 bedrooms 30 years ago. These rooms are used by those occupying official residences and by staff of the House whose duties may require the provision of overnight accommodation.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the problems of some elderly and unfit Members of Parliament—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."]. It would be unfair at Christmas to name them. Such hon. Members have problems getting to the Division Lobbies from their distant offices in the eight minutes allowed. Will my right hon. Friend consider giving priority to finding offices for hon. Members within the precincts of the House? Will he switch the bedrooms from the House to the distant offices vacated by hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend's question became more uncharitable as it proceeded. In the execution of the Bridge street project, it is hoped that it will be possible to shift some staff from the Palace of Westminster and that accommodation can then be made available to hon. Members. Of course, such allocation and the criteria for it are matters for the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

Mr. Beith: Is not one of the bedrooms occupied by the Lord Chancellor? Does he not sleep more easily in his bed than he should because he does not have the scrutiny of a Select Committee of this House over his Department, as do all other Ministers? Should not his slumber be made uneasy like that of other Ministers?

Mr. Biffen: I suspect that the premise of the question is wrong, and therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the conclusion.

Public Gallery (Access)

39. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will make a statement on the provision of access for blind people with guide dogs to the House of Commons Public Gallery.

Mr. Biffen: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 2 July.

Mr. Wareing: I have not seen that reply. Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that the facilities for blind people with their guide dogs are equivalent to those in the other place, where I understand Black Rod has a considerable element of discretion? Will he carefully monitor the position in the House of Commons Public Gallery? Will he consider the possibility of giving the Serjeant at Arms like discretion?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that an identical number of blind persons with dogs may attend the Strangers Gallery in the House of Lords as obtains in the House of Commons. In my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter I said that two places in the Gallery had been provided for blind persons with guide dogs. Since that arrangement was made six months ago, a place has been taken by a blind person with a guide dog on only one occasion. The visitor pronounced himself well satisfied.

Mr. Hayes: Given the difficulty that the blind seem to be having in gaining access to the Public Galleries, does my right hon. Friend not feel it outrageous that convicted terrorists are gaining access to Committee Rooms?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the question.

Mr. Pavitt: The Lord Privy Seal will recall that recently, following a debate on the blindness allowance, there were at least six blind persons present with their guide dogs. Will he consider ensuring that there is flexibility on certain occasions, which will enable him to give instructions to the Serjeant at Arms to increase the number of those permitted in with guide dogs?

Mr. Biffen: Certainly. I am sure that the appropriate Committee will be happy to consider that. Since the establishment of special places in the Galleries for the blind and their guide dogs, the facility has been used to the extent that admission has always been possible.

Mr. Hayward: Is it not the position that the Department of the Serjeant at Arms operates the provisions and facilities for the blind and other disabled with a great deal of flexibility when requests are made of it? Last week I brought a disabled person into the House and I received all the help that I needed from the Department.

Mr. Biffen: I am certain that that is so and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making the point. It enables me to say that the facilities that can be offered and supervised by the Serjeant at Arms are always that much better if lobbyists inform him in advance of their proposals.

Mr. Boyes: In considering the problems of the handicapped and the disabled, will the Leader of the House inform us whether a sign language interpreter for the deaf is permanently employed in the House? If not, will he be prepared to consider whether one should be so employed?

Mr. Biffen: I shall have that proposal investigated.

ENERGY

Selby Coalfield

20. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the current miners' strike has led to delays and cost overruns in the development of the Selby coalfield.

Mr. David Hunt: The total investment programme of the National Coal Board had been planned at £800 million for this year. The current strike has, however, halted work on many of the NCB's projects, including Selby, to the detriment of the industry's future.

Mr. Eggar: Was not the Selby development a signal to the entire coal mining industry that the Government

were committed to the future of coal mining? Was it not a severe blow when the National Union of Mineworkers decided to go ahead with picketing to stop development of this extremely important coalfield? Is there nothing that my hon. Friend can do to try to assist in getting more miners back to work so that development can continue at Selby despite the NUM's actions?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend that everything possible must be done. Since 1979 the Government have invested £3·9 billion in the coal industry. That investment is nearly 50 per cent. higher in real terms than investment in the previous five years by the Labour Government.

Mr. Heffer: As the amount of coal which the Government projected would be mined will not be reached because of the dispute, is it not time that the Government stopped intervening on the side of the Coal Board and took a step in intervening to achieve a settlement of the dispute, as has been asked for by Opposition Members? Given the Secretary of State's statement that there should be no negotiations, is not Mr. Scargill right in saying that the only way forward is industrial action by the rest of the working-class movement?

Mr. Hunt: It was noticeable that when the hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Scargill was right there was not one note of agreement throughout the Chamber.

Mr. Nellist: Yes, there was.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman was asleep. It is a fact that before the industrial action started our great coal industry had tremendous potential, but that is being lost every day that the dispute continues.

Mr. Rowe: Is there not a real danger that the longer the strike continues the more Mr. Scargill's gloomier predictions will become self-fulfulling? What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that when the strike comes to an end the damage that has been inflicted on the coal industry is laid at the door of those responsible?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. All Ministers at the Department of Energy are anxious to start on the rebuilding process. Since the beginning of the dispute, not only have 23 production faces had to be abandoned, but 13 salvage faces as well. In addition, 19 faces are giving cause for serious concern, and a further 65 faces are causing concern. It is a tradegy that the NUM is putting at risk those pits which its leaders claim they are fighting to save.

Mr. Foster: The Under-Secretary of State continues to plead how tragic it is for the industry that this dispute is continuing, and the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) is alarmed about the implications for Selby. If Tory Members are so worried about damage caused to the industry, why do they not lift a finger and get the people involved around the table to solve the dispute? Is the Secretary of State aware that he is profoundly mistaken if he believes that there is any political profit to be had in humiliating the miners and destroying mining communities?

Mr. Hunt: The solution to this dispute lay with a ballot held at the start of the dispute, in accordance with the long-established, democratic tradition of the NUM. If a ballot had been held, there would have been no need for these mass pickets, intimidation and violence. Not one miner would have gone to work. The sad fact is that the only way to end this dispute is for miners to vote with their feet and return to work.

CIVIL SERVICE

Northern Region (Job Transfers)

41. **Mr Dormand** asked the Minister for the Civil Service what are the number of Civil Service posts transferred to the northern region since May 1979.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): As I last told the hon. Gentleman on 20 November, the dispersal programme announced on 26 July 1979 did not include any transfer of posts to the northern region. Details of posts that may have been transferred by Departments for management reasons are not held centrally.

Mr. Dormand: Is the Minister aware that people in the north are sick and tired of seeing the Government shed crocodile tears over unemployment in the region? Here is a matter on which the Government can take direct action, and in nearly six years they have done absolutely nothing. The Government have actually transferred Civil Service jobs from the northern region to other parts of the country. In view of what the Minister said today, can we ever expect a change of policy in this matter?

Mr. Hayhoe: The dispersal programme, which was announced on 26 July, is being followed through. I can hold out no hope to the hon. Gentleman that a new dispersal policy will be brought before the House.

Administrative Grades (Recruitment)

42. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister for the Civil Service what initiatives he is taking to encourage scientists and engineers to be recruited, at least for limited periods, into the administrative grades of the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: Recruitment into administrative posts in the Civil Service is open to people from all disciplines and we seek through publicity and university visits to bring this fact to the attention of all potential recruits, including scientists and technologists. A total of 17 per cent. of successful candidates for administration trainee in 1984 had a scientific or technological background, compared to 11 per cent. in 1983.

Mr. Chapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving that information. While recognising the importance of attracting scientists and engineers into the administrative grades of the Civil Service, may I ask my hon. Friend to consider sympathetically the possibility of extending the unified grading approach to new entrants from the professions, as I am sure he will agree that that is the best and most effective initiative that we could take to attract such people into the Civil Service?

Mr. Hayhoe: I certainly support the concept of extending unified grading, and discussions are occurring to extend it down to principal level. I hope that those discussions will be completed soon. I am sure that that extension will have an encouraging effect on the outlook of engineers, technologists and scientists in the Civil Service.

Mr. Eastham: Is it not almost criminal that we are to recruit engineers and scientists into administration when

it costs many thousands of pounds to train those specialists? Is the Minister aware that, recently, a Select Committee on which I served was advised of grave shortages of some of those scientists, such as the shortages to which reference was made this afternoon?

Mr. Hayhoe: As one of the few chartered engineers in the House, I can say to the hon. Gentleman that I believe that people with such professional skills should be employed in the highest ranks of the Civil Service. Many of the matters with which the Civil Service deals and about which advice must be given to Ministers involves engineering, technological and scientific aspects. It is highly desirable that some of the people giving that advice should have been trained in those disciplines.

Delegation of Authority

43. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Minister for the Civil Service if he is satisfied with the level of delegation of authority within the Civil Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: The central Departments have already delegated a wide range of authorities to spending Departments, while maintaining where necessary common standards and rules across the Civil Service, and Departments in turn delegate a good deal to line managers. More delegation is needed and this is one of the aims of the changes in management under way in the Civil Service.

Mr. Eggar: Has not the record of delegation of authority within Deparments, rather than within the centre, been somewhat disappointing despite the fact that the financial management initiative drew attention to the need for delegation? Has my hon. Friend noted that the new report from the efficiency unit draws attention to that? Will he assure the House that he will lead a drive to ensure that Departments follow the recommendations of the efficiency unit?

Mr. Hayhoe: My hon. Friend, as so often on such matters, is right in what he says. We want to see more delegation. Delegation and accountability go together. We want to see that being extended. The financial management initiative has that as one of its main objectives. I shall do all that I can to facilitate progress on that initiative.

Trade Union Discussions

44. **Mr. Soley** asked the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the Civil Service trade unions; and what was discussed.

Mr. Hayhoe: I met the Civil Service unions on 4 December to discuss the Government's decisions on the 1984 report of the Top Salaries Review Body. The unions also took the opportunity to discuss with me some recent changes in travel and subsistence provisions.

Mr. Soley: Did the Minister take that opportunity to raise the subject of the review of VAT offices? Has he anything to say about the proposal to close 30 of them, in view of the Government's plan to increase VAT on some commodities—on newspapers, books and so on? What implication does that have for staffing? Will he make a statement on that subject to the trade unions?

Mr. Hayhoe: VAT was not discussed at my last meeting, which was with the Council of Civil Service Unions. Nor was it discussed at an earlier meeting that I held with union representatives from Customs and Excise. At that time they were raising matters about the customs part of the general responsibility of Customs and Excise.

Dr. McDonald: Is the Minister aware that in the pay negotiations going on at GCHQ, of the five members of the staff side three still retain their trade union membership? Does that not show the absurdity of the Government's ban on trade union membership there?

Mr. Hayhoe: No. What it does show is that the hon. Lady is relying upon a recent, inaccurate report in the *Financial Times*.

ENERGY

Electricity Prices (Landlords)

21. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the practice of some landlords in pricing electricity to tenants above the rate they are required to pay themselves; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Office of Fair Trading is currently considering the comments received on the consultative document which it issued earlier this year and expects to report its findings to Ministers in the new year.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree with me, without prejudging what the report says, that it is wrong for some landlords to charge their tenants double, or even more, for the price of energy than they themselves have to pay? When he sees the report, will he introduce legislation to make that impossible?

Mr. Goodlad: I am aware of the close interest that my hon. Friend has taken in this matter. Existing legislation provides that area boards shall set maximum permitted prices for the resale of electricity. Landlords may resell at that higher price to recoup their additional costs. The Office of Fair Trading reviewed the problems associated with the resale of electricity between 1974 and 1977. It was concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify recommending changes in legislation. I should not wish to anticipate the findings of the present review or the Government's response to it.

Coal Industry Dispute

22. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the coal strike.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth).

Mr. Nellist: Following the Under-Secretary's remarks about Selby coalfield, does the Secretary of State recognise that that coalfield, producing 10 million tonnes of coal, with 4,000 miners, is designed to replace equivalent production from 21 pits in the north Yorkshire area, which used to employ 16,000 men? Is not one of the central issues that fuels the anger of the miners the development of super pits such as Selby, and in areas of Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and so on, which is a preparation for future privatisation? It shows that the Government are less concerned about the continuation of jobs in communities and more concerned about lining the pockets of their big business mates.

Mr. Walker: It is remarkable that the hon. Gentleman should argue about the development of pits such as Selby, when a predecessor of mine in a Labour Government boasted of the enormous contributions made by Labour Governments towards Selby's development. The reason for the dispute is nothing to do with the development of Selby, which is in the interests of the coal industry. The leader of the NUM — I gather from the tapes — is reported to have repeated his demand at the meeting with the TUC this morning and informed it that the NUM is not prepared to allow the closure of any section of the industry, however small. That is in sharp contrast to what happened under all previous Labour Governments.

Mr. Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does the point of order arise directly out of questions?

Mr. Lawrence: No.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order later, then.

Banking Supervision

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about banking supervisory arrangements, in the light of the recent problems at Johnson Matthey Bankers Ltd.

I have now considered with the Governor of the Bank of England the events leading up to the rescue operation conducted by the bank on 1 October. It is clear that the case raises important issues about our present procedures of banking supervision, and the legislative framework within which it is conducted.

The Governor and I have therefore agreed to a full review of the present supervisory arrangements, and to consider whether any early changes in present supervisory procedures are needed. Issues to which particular attention will be given are the relationship between auditors and supervisors, staff experience and training, the handling of concentrations of risk and the assessment of quality of assets, notification and collection of statistics, and the adequacy and deployment of staff resources in the banking supervision department of the Bank of England. The review will also consider whether a more effective framework is required than that provided by the Banking Act 1979. I shall be placing a copy of the full terms of reference of the review in the House Library.

I shall, of course, inform the House as early as possible of the results of the review, including any legislative changes that I consider necessary.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The most significant fact about the statement is that the Government felt the sudden necessity, after 10 weeks, to go on record about the Johnson Matthey affair. No doubt the Chancellor believes that his message will be blandly reassuring, but the nature of the statement, and the fact that the right hon. Gentleman needed to make it today, will, I suspect, intensify rather than allay fears.

The City of London has been anxious about the matter for the past two months. Can the Chancellor tell us why it took that period of time before he was able to make a statement, in the House or elsewhere, about the changes that he regards as necessary? Has the delay been in part the product of the widely reported disagreements between the Bank of England and the Treasury about how the matter was disposed of? Can the Chancellor tell us whether he personally supports the view that the Bank should have virtually nationalised Johnson Matthey at 9.30 pm one Sunday evening? As well as telling us his view on the general principle underlying that disturbing pattern of events, will the right hon. Gentleman answer four questions, even in advance of the review which he has promised and which we shall no doubt debate?

First, will the review include a thoroughgoing examination of the Banking Act 1979 specifically to deal with the problems of early warning and whether the bank and the Government get sufficient warning in time about incipient collapse; whether the Act provides sufficient supervision in its quasi-voluntary form, or whether some sterner regulation is necessary?

Secondly, may we be told the relationship to the affair of Price Waterhouse and Co., and whether the Chancellor thinks that this firm of accountants is spreading its activities too widely across the entire economy of the United Kingdom?

Thirdly, may we be told about a second firm of accountants — Arthur Young McClelland Moores and Co.—the auditors, which gave the company a clean bill of health as recently as the middle of June last year? We hear that that firm of accountants is likely to be investigated by the standards body of its profession. Is that true?

Fourthly, the Governor of the Bank of England is on record as saying that institutions should stand or fall according to their own performance. Does that rule apply to companies within the City of London, or does it apply only to manufacturing industries, which are allowed to fall by the Government, thereby causing large-scale unemployment?

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman asked whether there would be a thoroughgoing examination of the Labour Government's Banking Act 1979. As I have said, in so far as the provisions of that Act are relevant—and many of them are—they will be very much at the heart of the inquiry. I do not want to prejudge the results of the inquiry, but it may well be that it will be necessary to introduce certain amendments to the Banking Act. However, we shall have to await the results of the inquiry.

Price Waterhouse has little, if anything, to do with the case. As the right hon. Gentleman said, the auditors are Arthur Young McClelland Moores and Co. As I said in my statement, the relationship with the auditors and, indeed, the general relationship between auditors of banks and the supervisory authority, are extremely germane and will be at the centre of the inquiry. As to whether firms stand or fall by their results, the shareholders of Johnson Matthey, the parent company, of which Johnson Matthey Bankers is a wholly-owned subsidiary, have lost three quarters of their money — some £¼ billion — and the entire top management, from the chairman downwards, have been obliged to resign. That, I think, answers the right hon. Gentleman's question.

It comes rich from the right hon. Gentleman to ask why it has taken me so long to come to a considered judgment on the best way of investigating banking supervision, because until I announced that I would make a statement today he had not asked one question about this matter.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): The House, particularly the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, will need to consider carefully what my right hon. Friend has said, in the light of the document to which he referred. Has he any views on the likely timing of the inquiry? When it is completed, will it be presented to the House as a Green Paper or in some other way?

Mr. Lawson: Given that this is a highly complex matter, it is difficult at this stage to say how long the inquiry will take, but it will be completed as soon as possible. As to how the results are reported to the House, I shall have to determine that in the light of the inquiry, which will go into matters of very great commercial confidentiality, including relationships between banks and their clients. I cannot yet say how I shall report to the House, but, as I said in my statement, I shall report the results of the inquiry, together with whatever action I think it proper to take.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Does the Chancellor accept that his remarks are unsatisfactory? There is now a contingent liability on public funds of £75 million. This matter began with no liability on public funds, it went to £10 million, and many of us are wondering whether the figure will go above £75 million. Will the Chancellor reassure us on that point? Will he confirm that public money is involved, because if the public liability is taken up there will be a loss of dividends from the banking department to the Treasury?

Secondly, will the Chancellor reveal the extent of his own involvement? He told me in a letter that this was entirely the decision of the Governor of the Bank of England. The Governor told me that he had been consulted at all stages. I understand that Sir Peter Middleton was heavily involved in the early stages of the rescue. The Chancellor insisted that no public money should be involved. These are serious matters and very disturbing events in the City of London. To have a public inquiry or the kind of assurance from him for which his right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has asked —that there should be revealed to this House the basis of this internal investigation—is the minimum that is needed. Above all, the Chancellor, who is very complacent about this affair, has a duty to say to the House whether any more public money is at risk other than the £75 million.

Mr Lawson: Far from being complacent, I have shown myself to be very concerned about what appeared to me to be possible weaknesses in the system of banking supervision in this country, which goes far beyond the issue which has brought the matter to light; namely, the collapse of Johnson Matthey Bankers Ltd. That is why I thought it right to have in inquiry into the adequacy of banking supervision in this country: both the way in which the existing system is operated, and whether it statutory framework needs to be improved. As to whether there should be an internal inquiry, or a public inquiry, because of the nature of the matter it is right that it should be an internal inquiry, which will involve not only the Bank of England but the Treasury and an independent consultant.

As for when I knew about it, the Governor notified me of the action which he intended to take shortly before the rescue was announced. As for the funds, my approval was neither sought nor required. Perhaps I might refer the right hon. Gentleman to an occasion when he was a Minister in a previous Labour Government. In the case of Slater Walker, my predecessor but one, the right hon. Gentleman's former colleague, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), said when he was asked about it, inevitably by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner):

"I was aware of the general approach adopted by the Bank of England to the problems of the Slater Walker Group".

The right hon. Gentleman continued:

"My specific approval of the standby loan facility and guarantee was neither sought nor required."—[*Official Report*, 13 October 1976; Vol. 917, c. *142-43*.]

That is the relationship between the Bank of England and the Treasury and between the Governor and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As for the resources which are at risk, these are not voted funds. They are the own resources of the Bank of England.

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with the ever-growing internationalisation of financial markets and the development of 24-hour markets, the supervisory role of all central banks is becoming increasingly more difficult to perform, and that, although it is important to try to achieve the most efficient legislative and codification arrangements possible, in the last resort these matters, which often have to be handled very quickly and in a situation of some crisis, depend for their successful resolution upon having men of great judgment and experience running the central banks and that whatever we do we should be careful not to reduce the role of the Bank of England to that of the Treasury's poodle?

Mr. Lawson: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but there is no question of the Bank of England being a Treasury poodle. At issue here is the adequacy of our banking supervisory arrangements, for which the Treasury clearly has responsibility. The Banking Act 1979, which is the statutory framework within which it is conducted, is an Act of Parliament for which there is Treasury responsibility. Therefore, it is necessary for the Treasury as well as the Bank of England to be involved in this inquiry.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I, too, welcome the review which the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced, but will he be more forthcoming about the liability of the Bank of England? This is an important matter. We are committing public money to the rescue of a bank, although similar amounts of public money are not being given to many worthy individuals or companies whose businesses have collapsed during the past five years. If there is to be sauce for the one, there must be sauce for the other. The right hon. Gentleman must tell us about the amounts of money involved, because those same amounts could have saved many jobs in many worthwhile industries all over the country.

Mr. Lawson: So far, the Bank of England has paid only £1 from the banking department's own resources. It is true that, beyond that, there is an indemnity, jointly between private sector banks and others and the Bank of England of £75 million each. It is far too soon to say how much of that indemnity will be required.

In making the comparisons which the right hon. Gentleman sought to make, he knows as well as I do, because he is a former Financial Secretary to the Treasury, that in every country in the world the central bank has a responsibility, as a lender of last resort, for the banking system. It has to decide in each case whether it is right for it to use that authority as a lender of last resort and, if so, in what way. It was the clear view of the Governor that there was a threat to the London gold market, which is a very important market for this country. That was a factor of which he had to take full cognisance.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My right hon. Friend's announcement that the relationship between the auditors and the supervisory authority is to be the subject of a review is welcome, but can he tell us whether he has recommended to the Bank of England or others that the auditors in this case should be sued?

Mr. Lawson: I have made no such recommendation, but, leaving aside the question of litigation, when a

company becomes insolvent as rapidly as Johnson Matthey Bankers did, questions arise about the role of the company's auditors. The auditors signed off the company's accounts without qualification on 18 June of this year. Of course, beyond the particular case—the House might do well to concentrate on this—there is the question of the role of banks' auditors and the relationship between the auditors and the supervisory authority.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The House will be grateful to the Chancellor for mentioning, after 17 minutes, the London gold bullion market and for saying that it was involved in the considerations of the Governor of the Bank of England. Was not the lifeboat of the Bank of England launched to help speculators in the gold market rather than those who put their money into real wealth creation in industry in this country?

Mr. Lawson: That is not true. The case was one of a particular bank which got into serious trouble. As far as I am aware, it was a one-off case. The matter was complicated by the fact that the bank was wholly owned by a leading member of the bullion market.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Bearing in mind the fact that Johnson Matthey had such a pivotal position in the London bullion market, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Bank of England would have been right to try to rescue Johnson Matthey if it could have achieved, as its initial press release said it had achieved, a rescue in which there was no liability of public funds? Will my right hon. Friend address his mind to what has gone wrong between the original press statement of no liabilities and the present situation where we hear that there could be £75 million of liability of public funds? Where are the guilty men?

Mr. Lawson: I seem to have heard that last phrase somewhere before. My hon. Friend asks what has gone wrong. I think that what has gone wrong is that there is prima facie evidence of a weakness in the way that the banking supervisory system operates. That is precisely why I have set the review in motion.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): Is not the Chancellor's dilemma about whether to have a public inquiry into all aspects of the matter dominated by his desire to protect the reputations of leading personalities in the City and of some ex-hon. Members and current hon. Members?

Mr. Lawson: I have not the faintest idea to whom the hon. Gentleman is referring.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that most of us believe that he has acted entirely properly and with some circumspection before launching the inquiry? Does he agree that if we are to have full confidence in the inquiry, bearing in mind the responsibilities and supervisory role of the Bank of England, noble Lords in the upper House, who have great experience in these matters and who are Privy Councillors, should be included in the inquiry team? If that is done, all hon. Members can have confidence in the inquiry and the report that results from it.

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his initial remarks. I assure him that he can have complete confidence in the inquiry that I have set in motion.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Was the Chancellor surprised at the collapse of Johnson Matthey in the buoyant enterprise society in which he keeps telling us we live, and at the disinclination of private interests to rescue the bank, which would have been an alternative to having recourse to the Bank of England and public funds?

Mr. Lawson: It is wrong to say that the private sector was unwilling to come forward. It provided a substantial sum. In addition to the initial sum that was invested, especially by Charter Consolidated, the private sector has invested 50-50 with the Bank of England in the £150 million indemnity.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is my right hon. Friend not aware that public anxiety on these occasions is always about the phrase "internal inquiry"? To avoid good old-fashioned City magic circle-ism in this extremely disturbing story, will he assure us that the inquiry will be fully publicised, properly set up and will include eminent people, who may come from the upper House, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) suggested?

Mr. Lawson: I am sure that my hon. Friend, who earns his living in the City, as well as in Parliament, will understand that matters of high commercial confidentiality are involved, such as the relationship between the bank and its clients. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for this to be a public inquiry. I have made my concern clear to the House by having a full review of the workings of the existing system and of whether the system should be improved. I shall report my conclusions fully to the House. If legislative changes are required, the House will have the fullest opportunity to debate them.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Does the Chancellor accept that his weasel words cannot disguise the extraordinary fact that the Government, who believe in the magic of the market, nationalised for £1 an uneconomic bank late one Sunday evening? Does he agree that that shows that the Government have one law for uneconomic banks and another law for uneconomic pits and factories?

When the right hon. Gentleman speaks about a serious failure of supervision, does that not raise questions, which were hinted at by the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Mr. Tapsell), about the Governor of the Bank of England, whose qualifications were questioned by the Labour party and by many leading figures in the City when he was appointed?

Finally,——

Mr. Tapsell: There is no such implication.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Although the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is a Front-Bench spokesman, he should ask one question only, as other hon. Members do.

Mr. Lawson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who will have heard the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Mr. Tapsell) that there is no such imputation about the Governor of the Bank of England, who is a distinguished banker, will withdraw his remark.

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): I welcome the review. For the benefit of ignorant Opposition Members, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that the Johnson Matthey group employs a large number of people in manufacturing industry and that the prompt action of the Bank of England safeguarded their jobs?

Mr. Lawson: That is absolutely right. The Johnson Matthey group has a gold refining business, various other manufacturing businesses and employs many people, some of whom, if I am not mistaken, are in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Does the Chancellor agree that, in view of the seriousness of the matter, it is inadequate that there is no independent element in the review that he has announced? Does he further agree that it is incorrect that those who were partly responsible for the collapse should inquire into themselves? Does it not reflect badly upon the Bank of England that it has implemented inadequately the legislation that has been passed during the past four years?

Mr. Lawson: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The inquiry will be a joint one between the Bank of England, which is the supervising authority, and the Treasury. The Treasury will be fully involved. An independent consultant experienced in banking will also be involved. That consultant has not yet been appointed.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): If the Chancellor can give £75 million from public funds to bail out Johnson Matthey, do not his friends in the City think that with this Government it is Christmas all the year round? If he can provide such money out of public funds for them, why can he not waive VAT on the Band Aid record so that that money can be used to relieve the famine in Ethiopia?

Mr. Lawson: I have given no money, and no taxpayers' money is involved in this. The hon. Gentleman mentioned an important factor. Because the Governor of the Bank of England decided to intervene in this case, under his authority and using the resources of the banking department of the Bank of England, it does not follow that he would do so in any other case, were one to arise.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not true that an investigation of Johnson Matthey's accounts has shown that half of the loan portfolio was in risky ventures to which it should never have lent money? Is it not also true that that information was relayed to the Bank of England 12 months ago? May we therefore presume that that information was also relayed to the Chancellor about 12 months ago? Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that he knew 12 months in advance of the possibility that the bank would fail in the way that it has and that the Exchequer would be required to pick up the bill in the form of a £70 million indemnity?

Mr. Lawson: First, the Exchequer has not picked up the bill. Secondly, of course I did not have the knowledge to which the hon. Gentleman referred. All these matters, including the loan book of Johnson Matthey bankers, will be germane to the general review into the adequacy of the present banking supervisory arrangements.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chancellor is clearly foolish to pretend that the £75 million, which may technically be a matter for the Bank of England, is not a charge on public funds. It is clearly money which, were it not used for this purpose, might be used for far more desirable purposes. The Chancellor makes a technical, and therefore false, distinction between the two.

Perhaps the Chancellor will clear up some of the added confusion that he has caused. He said that he did not understand my reference to Price Waterhouse and Co. I may be wrong, but I understand that it was the firm of accountants asked by the Government to consider the company's business. When did it become involved? Was it involved when the problem seemed much less serious that it does 10 weeks after the collapse?

Secondly, have any attempts been made to ensure that the risks that may be involved and any money that may be required will properly be debted to the parent company of Johnson Matthey, which I understand is not regarded by the Bank of England as being responsible for the potential debt?

Thirdly, and most importantly, may I ask the Chancellor again a question which he has so far not attempted to answer concerning his attitude to the affair. He said that he was told about the arrangement shortly before the public announcement. He was clearly not consulted, but was informed that it was happening. The House should know whether the Chancellor approves of the rescue in this case. If he approves of this rescue, there will be many more desirable rescues of which the House will expect him to approve.

Mr. Lawson: On the last point, I have made clear, my approval was neither sought nor required. I was informed of the position shortly before the announcement was made in what has become the conventional way, and obviously there was no time for me to consider the full details of the matter then. Price Waterhouse and Co. was asked by the Bank of England to conduct a quick examination of Johnson Matthey's accounts at a late stage, but before the rescue, when the Bank of England had serious doubts about the state of Johnson Matthey's loan book.

I am sorry, but I have forgotten the right hon. Gentleman's third question.

Mr. Hattersley: It was about the involvement of the parent company, which I understand—the Chancellor will correct me if I am wrong—may not be responsible for the debt and for the rescue operation costs which the Bank of England has underwritten.

Mr. Lawson: I have already made it clear that the parent company has lost its entire investment in Johnson Matthey Bankers. The top management, from the chairman downwards, have been obliged to resign and the company now has a market capitalisation of £90 million, which is after some injection of cash from Charter Consolidated, having had a market capitalisation of £320 million before the rescue operation.

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have an important private Members' day today.

BILL PRESENTED

TRUSTEE SAVINGS BANKS

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Peter Rees, Mr. Giles Shaw, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Barney Hayhoe, Mr. Ian Stewart, Dr. Rhodes Boyson, Mr. Allan Stewart and Mr. Alex Fletcher, presented a Bill to make provision for the purposes of or in connection with the reorganisation into companies incorporated under the Companies Acts of the institutions regulated by or existing under the Trustee Savings Banks Act 1981 and for the treatment for the purposes of the Banking Act 1979 of any Scottish savings bank established before 28th July 1983 which has not since become a trustee savings bank: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 45].

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the four motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Sale of Optical Appliances Order of Council 1984 (S.I., No. 1778) be referred to a Standing Committee of Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agriculture and Horticulture Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1984 (S.I. 1984, No. 1923) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) (Amendments) Regulations 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Novelties (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1985 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

British Shipping Industry

4.1 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that the shipping industry is not only of great importance to the United Kingdom's trade and commerce, but also to the United Kingdom's defence needs and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation commitment; notes with concern the decline of the British merchant fleet in terms of tonnage and share of world markets; and asks Her Majesty's Government to state its policies for helping the industry to improve its international competitive position.

Both the constituencies that I have had the honour to represent have strong maritime connections, and that is one reason for choosing the state of our Merchant Navy as the subject for my private Member's motion. The other is that since the Conservative Government took power in 1979 there has been no opportunity, in either Government or Opposition time, for a general debate on an industry which is crucial to this country's economic prosperity and its strategic defence.

It is true that we have had Adjournment debates about the Merchant Navy, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who had an Adjournment debate on this subject in March 1983. I am sure that the House will also applaud my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) for initiating his Adjournment debate on the Merchant Navy in October 1982, for the general way in which he has spoken up on behalf of the merchant shipping industry and for the way in which he drew attention to the state of our merchant fleet during the recent debate on the Royal Navy. The House will also salute my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton for taking over the chairmanship of the all-party merchant shipping group, which has just come into being, and not a moment too soon.

I am afraid that apart from those debates and occasional "quickies" on small matters of shipping legislation, the Finance Bills have offered the best opportunities to say things about shipping. Perhaps that underlines the importance of fiscal policy for this vital industry. It is a pity that all the Treasury Ministers who were here a moment ago, and to whom many of our remarks this afternoon will be directed, are not here to listen to this debate.

The debate is necessary because the British merchant fleet, in spite of being one of the world's most modern and efficient, is declining at the rate of about two ships per week, which could nearly extinguish it by the end of the decade. Cruise ships and ferries may be doing all right, but by the year 2000 we may have a fleet which consists only of cruise ships and ferries, and that would not be good enough for our trading position. As recently as 1966 our fleet was the largest in the world, representing 12·5 per cent. of world tonnage.

When I first went to Bristol as a candidate in 1975, our merchant fleet was still at an all-time, but somewhat exceptional, peak. However, our position in the international league table was then already beginning to slip because our overseas rivals, often with massive state aid, were outgrowing us and adding to the excessive world tonnage. For the last decade the gap between available tonnage and cargoes has been steadily widening. Symbolic of the mounting shipping surplus is the fact that two of the

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earliest ships which I saw use the new Royal Portbury dock in Bristol, which were recently launched OCL container ships, were laid up because there was no demand.

As I look out from the Waterside part of my constituency across the Solent, I see the horizon blanked off by the huge hulk of the Burma Endeavour standing idle in Southampton, not on account of the industrial dispute in the docks, although there is plenty of that, with dockers determined to scuttle the port of Southampton, their jobs and the jobs of many of my constituents who are working in the dock-related services, but because there is no economic demand for its 500,000 tonnes oil-carrying capacity. It is cheaper for BP to pay £1 million a year in wages, maintenance and mooring fees to keep her idle in dock.

Therefore, I hope that today I can, first, convince the House that Britain needs the Merchant Navy. Secondly, I shall explain why our share in world shipping is down to 3 per cent. and still falling fast. Thirdly, I shall try to suggest what we should be doing to halt and perhaps reverse this dangerous downward trend.

Why do we need a Merchant Navy? In answer to that question I shall quote from a pamphlet entitled "British Shipping—the Right Course", of which I am the joint author with Mr. Jonathan Marks, a shipbroker, a good Tory and one day, I hope, a Member of Parliament. In the introduction to the pamphlet we said:

"Britain's economic prosperity depends on our success in international trade. It generates a third of our national income and employs a corresponding part of our workforce.

As a major exporting and importing nation, it is essential for us to have free access to world markets to sell our goods and services.

It is equally vital to be able to purchase raw materials and finished products abroad.

We need the freedom to invest overseas and to attract foreign capital into Britain.

No other leading industrialised country has so clear a stake in open trading markets.

The prosperity of our country rests upon this foundation."

Our shipping industry is of critical importance in sustaining Britain's competitive performance in these world markets. The comparative advantages which a British-owned and registered fleet once enjoyed have made it one of the largest national flags and made a major contribution to our overseas earnings. Even now, an industry which employs more than 45,000 officers, ratings and cadets on about 800 vessels, which earns about £3·5 billion per annum and which in total contributes a surplus of £1 billion to the balance of payments each year is clearly vital to our economy. Threats to its prosperity constitute a danger to our long-term interests.

Our shipping industry is now in a state of crisis. The advantages which we once enjoyed in supplying shipping services have long since ebbed away and our fleet has shrunk accordingly. The world recession has compounded our problems. It has cut British shipping traffic with disproportionate severity. It has been argued that if our fleet continued to decline at the present rate it would be impossible to mount another Falklands expedition and could cast doubt on our ability to fulfil our NATO commitments.

While this has been happening, we have seen the growth of unfair competition. We have seen Governments in developing countries build up their fleets. We have seen moves by our overseas competitors towards protectionism and even more state subsidies. We have seen the massive growth of the Comecon fleet, which, as well as being part of the Soviet Union's naval might, is in a position to wage economic war on this country. Nor should we forget that it is our maritime tradition that helps to make the City of London what it is. Sink our merchant fleet and untold damage will be done to the maritime service industries such as insurance and the Baltic Exchange, ship forwarders and travel agents which today provide world-wide services to shipowners everywhere. They are very important, too.

There are many reasons why we need a merchant fleet, and it is important and appropriate to mention at this stage three independent organisations which think likewise—the Nautical Institute, the Greenwich Forum and the British Maritime League—and pay tribute to the work that they have done and are doing to broaden and to deepen the debate on merchant shipping.

It is not surprising that voices have been raised within and without the shipping industry calling for drastic action to prevent a further decline of our fleet. One purpose of this debate is to ask the Government what they are doing to bring forward maritime policies which will halt and reverse that downward trend.

Before looking for remedies, it is important to examine the reasons for the decline. There has been no shortage of analyses, but diagnosing the ill is very much easier than prescribing a cure.

The British Maritime League has completed the most recent in-depth study in response to a request from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. The league rightly concludes that the main underlying cause of our fleet's decline is the impractibility of trading fairly in a market which is no longer governed by economics alone. Our competitors will do anything to survive when far too many ships are chasing far too little cargo. I know that it is a cliché, but it is the old case of Britain playing cricket while the rest of the world perform karate.

More specifically, the causes of the decline of our fleet can be either international, over which we have no direct control, or national, over which Britain — the Government or the shipowners or the unions — have some significant influence. The causes also apply either generally to the whole of the British merchant fleet or to particular sections of it.

Internationally, the world recession has reduced the demand for seaborne trade, and the debts of many developing countries and also the Comecon countries have put a high priority on acquiring foreign exchange. Our trade with Europe has grown at the expense of long-haul trade. Shipping requirements have been grossly overestimated by Governments, shipowners and banks. There were, for example, too many tankers in the early 1970s before the oil crisis, and too many bulk carriers in the late 1970s. The growth in protectionism is both national and international and includes national subsidies, direct and indirect, national flag discrimination or preference, national Government interference in conferences, multilateral and bilateral financial aid to developing countries for shipping projects and, of course, the UNCTAD 40-40-20 liner code for freight. More efficient ships have been introduced. There has been a growth in competition from flags of convenience, with lower taxation, minimal regulation, lower crew costs and, in some cases, less costly safety standards.

Another international cause for the decline of our cargo liner fleet is the development of the Trans-Siberian railway, which is now taking an increasing share — nearly 30 per cent. — of the trade between Europe and the far east.

Further threats to our liners are, first, the growth of the massive Taiwanese Evergreen and United States lines' fleets, which will be operating round-the-world container services outside the conferences; secondly, the increased practice of cargo reservation by countries such as Latin America, India and Sri Lanka; and, thirdly, reserved cabotage exercised in various forms by France, West Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, all the Comecon countries, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Finland, India — at least we can beat the Indians at cricket, even if we cannot beat them at shipping — Panama and most countries in south America and south-east Asia. The list is a very impressive one — *[Interruption.]* I am glad to see the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East here now. I was paying credit to him earlier in my remarks.

To sum up, it is a very inhospitable and unfair market in which British shipowners have to compete, and we cannot afford to have any self-imposed handicaps. I know that it is dangerous to generalise, but it is nevertheless true to say that shipowners, both British and foreign, choose to fly the Red Duster because of the fiscal policies and tax regimes of successive Governments, and they have registered elsewhere—or "flagged out" as it is called—because of excessive operating costs, particularly crew costs. Until recently there were extreme cases where British crews were twice as expensive as Chinese crews, not only because of wage levels, but because of the related welfare payments — the so-called social wage which owners have to meet. British ships also tended to be overmanned, and it is greatly to the credit of the seamen's unions that at least on new ships our manning levels are now comparable internationally.

I cannot be as complimentary about the Government. Until recently our fiscal policies and tax regimes were an incentive to "flag in". Now it is quite the reverse. In his 1984 Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did his best to torpedo what was left of the British-registered fleet. Apart from adding to crew costs by removing overseas tax relief, he ended the 100 per cent. first-year allowance coupled with free depreciation. Admittedly, thanks to some tough talking during the passage of the Finance Bill, the Government recognised that shipping was a special case and introduced instead free depreciation on a 25 per cent. writing-down allowance, but this is thought by shipowners to be totally inadequate when compared with what other western European Governments are doing to increase their financial support for their shipping. The Red Duster is now being put at a competitive disavantage against nearly every other fleet.

With due respect to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, I think that there is a very good case to have the debate answered by a Treasury Minister. Indeed, I should like to see my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Dispatch Box. I do not suppose that he would be able to say very much, because we have to accept that between now and Budget day he is in purdah, but I hope that he will read the debate and take action on what is said during it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): That is true of every Department.

Mr. Colvin: We shall hear what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State says. We are looking for action by the Department of Transport, too.

It is appropriate, therefore, that in suggesting policies to halt and, if possible, to reverse the decline of our merchant fleet I should start with fiscal policies. Even if the General Council of British Shipping has slightly overplayed its hand in years gone by, I believe that its new proposal, which formed part of the industry's submission to the Government for the 1985 Finance Bill, for a 50 per cent. ship allowance on new and secondhand ships in addition to the 25 per cent. writing-down allowance should be considered most seriously. There are other proposals on balancing charges, consortium group relief, the business expansion scheme and overseas earnings tax relief. I know that they sound a lot, but they do no more than bring us into line with some of our main overseas competitors.

On manning, I have paid tribute to the way in which seamen have helped to improve productivity. Of course, most of the reductions that have already been made through the joint efforts of shipowners and unions are in discretionary manning. It needs the Department of Transport to adopt a more innovative and flexible attitude towards statutory manning levels, particularly for officers, if further progress is to be made.

I welcome the recently agreed research into manning and technology which the Department of Transport is sponsoring, and the efficient ship project, at present the subject of a feasibility study being sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry, could show us how to make further progress in combining high technology and lower manning, and Britain is very good at that.

Related to manning are the subjects of regulation and safety. Britain has taken a lead in improving safety at sea. In 1959 we helped to set up what is now the International Maritime Organisation and have consistently applied safety standards which are stricter than those required by the IMO convention. As a result, the casualty rate for British-registered ships is now only one eighth of that of the world fleet for similar ships. That is good, and it is very welcome, but many of the requirements, both for safety and other equipment, may be unnecessarily restrictive and saddle British operators with unreasonable additional costs. Mr. Iain Sproat, when he was Minister, began to get to grips with this problem, but the task of removing petty regulations is far from complete and remains a major deterrent in terms of money and time to owners and operators wishing to "flag in" and sail under the Red Duster. We also want to see the rules tightened and enforced internationally to prevent our overseas competitors sacrificing safety in order to cut costs and therefore to underquote us.

I have mentioned the unfair protectionist policies of many of our overseas competitors. Unfortunately, our partners in Europe are among the worst offenders. Two things have happened which might help to put that right. The first is the appointment of Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis as Transport Commissioner. Those of us who knew him in this place will welcome the arrival in that office of someone with such knowledge of transport matters. The second is the publication by the European Commission of

[Mr. Colvin]

its comprehensive paper outlining a possible common shipping policy. Our shipping industry has already welcomed that and I do too. It is long overdue.

Shipping is excluded from the competition articles of the treaty of Rome. That is why the Commission's proposal to open up existing restrictions within the Community concerning cabotage and cargo reservation is welcome. I understand that it is also to make proposals for defending British and Community shipping from protectionist measures and unfair practices in other countries throughout the world, particularly the Eastern bloc and the developing nations. How about subjecting the Comecon fleet to a quota system for calls at European ports if those countries continue to refuse to allow European ships to call at their ports?

Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell us whether Her Majesty's Government support the view that if we in Europe could get our house in order and adopt a common policy toward the rest of the world we could negotiate from a position of far greater strength for the open trading system upon which the prosperity of our shipping industry depends? For example, the Brussels package, which was a European response to the UNCTAD liner code, will go a long way towards securing access to the crucial cross trades for British shipowners.

The United Kingdom cannot deal with the problems of unfair competition single handed. If we reacted against protectionism by closing our ports to liners of the offending countries, it would do us no good at all unless the ports of Rotterdam, Antwerp and Le Havre were also closed. There is obviously a role for the Community here, but I hope that it will be a constructive one, aimed at keeping trade open, rather than retaliating against the outside world. Can my hon. Friend tell us how the Government will react to the idea of a common shipping policy?

One target for united European action is the United States. I understand that a dialogue on a broad range of shipping policy issues has been going on for two years now between the United States and the Consultative Shipping Group, which includes the European countries and Japan. That dialogue has been mainly concerned with preserving free access to trades in the liner shipping sector in the face of protectionist restrictions in other countries. Is it not about time that we started straight talking with the Americans about the repeal of the Jones Act, which reserves all their cabotage for their ships?

It is not, of course, all gloom and despondency in every sector of our shipping industry. The cruise liner business is reasonably healthy and ferries are doing well, thanks to the growth of trade with Europe, which has hit our deep sea cargoes. Until recently the offshore oil market has been a growth sector, with the British offshore support fleet of some 150 vessels now accounting for nearly 20 per cent. of the United Kingdom-owned and registered fleet. But British supply-shipowners are extremely dissatisfied with their position vis-a-vis foreign flag supply boats operating in the North sea, particularly our Norwegian allies.

At any time one would find that, out of 180 supply ships in the United Kingdom sector, about 40 per cent. would be flying a foreign flag and half would be Norwegian. Contrast that with the position in the Norwegian sector where, out of about 80 ships, rarely more than a couple fly a foreign flag. Today there is only one British flag ship in the Norwegian sector, and that is beneficially owned in Norway.

Two financial inquiries have been carried out in recent months, one by the joint shipowners and the other by the joint Governments. Why are Norwegian ships able to offer lower rates? If it is true that the Norwegian financial assistance gives them the edge over the British, surely our financial system should be changed. At least, British shipowners should be given the chance to requote for business in the Norwegian sector.

Before concluding, I want to mention briefly the conference system, registration and defence. I am sure my hon. Friends will agree that the idea of the liner conference system—in effect, one of cartels—is anathema to our free market economy ideas. But we are dealing with a business which is neither free nor fair. Therefore, any immediate tinkering with the system would quickly lead to disaster, with the break-up of much of our fleet and the consequent loss of influence world-wide.

The conference system is still needed to ensure stability and regularity in the provision of liner services. However, I am critical in my pamphlet of the way in which conferences have repeatedly increased rates without consultation. How does my hon. Friend feel about the conference system? The House would particularly like to hear whether the idea that was being canvassed a little while ago on loyalty arrangements is still being pursued. That was, in effect, that no individual shipper could be required to put more than 70 per cent. of his custom with the conference in order to qualify for the rebate available in many trades in return for loyalty.

I noted that the Department of Transport recently issued a consultative document on registration suggesting changes in the criteria for registration under the United Kingdom flag. That contains valuable proposals for regularising the position in relation to Commonwealth countries where we have no jurisdiction. I hope that the Government will legislate along those lines. Will they go further and establish a register of ships owned by British companies, but registered under foreign flags, so that at least we know the real size of the British beneficially owned fleet? Most importantly, perhaps, will the Government stand firm against demands from the developing countries that open registries should be outlawed?

Lastly, I want to mention the Merchant Navy's defence role, which was touched on during the recent debate on the Royal Navy and about which the Under-Secretary of State had just given evidence to the Select Committee on Defence. Is today's British flag fleet really adequate for our defence needs? We were only just able to assemble 54 merchant ships in 1982 to support the 53 Royal Navy ships in the Falklands task force. Even then, some of those had to be chartered foreign flag carriers. Will my hon. Friend tell us today what he told the Committee last week? Will he also say something about the Government's review of future requirements for merchant ships in support of defence plans? As there is now general agreement that if the decline of our fleet continues our defence capability will be greatly weakened, what kind of arrangements will the Government be prepared to make when gaps in our strategic reserve are identified?

Even if the Government can requisition foreign ships to make up any gaps in our own provision, what will they do to ensure that we have an adequate supply of trained

British crews to man such ships when foreign nationals are not prepared to face hostilities? Can the Government cross their hearts and echo the words of G. W. Hunt in 1875, who said:

"We don't want to fight, but, by jingo if we do,
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too."

What has my hon. Friend to say about that?

Our Merchant Navy is a big and somewhat technical subject for debate. I have spoken for far too long already. Nevertheless, I have left a multitude of items for hon. Members to cover.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I have been listening with great interest and some sympathy to what the hon. Gentleman has had to say, but does he not find it surprising —I certainly do—that neither of his hon. Friends who represent Southampton is present in the Chamber to hear what he has to say?

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I represent part of Southampton. Eastleigh now includes the Woolston ward of Southampton.

Mr. Colvin: The intervention of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) does not do him credit. My hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) and for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) have repeatedly taken part in debates, and I am sure that they will be in the Chamber later to participate in this debate.

With the exception of the hon. Member for Dagenham, who has made a facetious intervention, I thank those hon. Members present for their patience and their supportive noises during my speech. The decline of our merchant shipping industry from the pre-eminent position that it occupied so recently is truly a melancholy story. Our fleet faces extinction, and we should be fighting for its survival at least as passionately as we fight for the preservation of the whale. The trouble is that it is not until the species is about to be extinct that anyone takes any notice. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State now face a challenge and an opportunity. If they fail, and if our merchant fleet disappears, they, like the Cheshire cat, may disappear too—the only differences being that there will be no smile left behind.

4.31 pm

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): I declare my interest as deputy chairman of Furness Withy and Company Ltd. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his choice of subject, which is not only important but under-debated.

I shall not recite again the figures that tell the sad story of our merchant fleet since 1975. The reason we Members of Parliament are debating shipping today is that each one of us is deeply concerned that the fleet has fallen in size, is still falling steeply and is expected to fall still further. Britain is now losing merchant ships at a greater speed than at the height of the second world war. They are victims not of torpedoes but of ever-rising costs, far eastern competition, and subsidised shipbuilding which makes ships too cheap to buy and thus leads to a surplus that in turn means uneconomic rates and cut-throat competition.

That general situation was exacerbated by the oil crisis, which led to a recession and to countries drawing their oil supplies from fields nearer home, thus making large tankers redundant. No one has escaped the biggest shipping slump for 50 years. Even the spectacularly successful Hong-Kong shipowners, Y.K. Pao, C. Y. Tung and Frank Chao have reduced their ship numbers and diversified into property, container terminals, support vessels for oilfields and so on. The great BP and Shell tanker fleets are a fraction of their former size.

In those worldwide conditions the British fleet, with its high costs, was bound to suffer more than most. Many famous shipping names have disappeared. Others such as British and Commonwealth and Furness Withy have been selling off ships during the past five years at an almost hectic speed, and have diversified into other areas. P and O has had to write off £77 million in its balance sheet in respect of gas carriers.

However, there is a brighter side to the picture. For example, 20 per cent. of the merchant fleet—150 ships in all—is servicing North sea oil and other more distant oilfields with some of the most sophisticated ships in the world such as the Orelia, which was fitted out on Humberside and is now in the Persian gulf. We lead the world in luxury cruising. The commissioning of the Royal Princess took one back to the launching of the Queens, except that, regrettably, the Royal Princess was not built on Clydebank. The Atlantic Conveyor, a third generation combined container roll-on roll-off ship is about to join the Cunard fleet. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has said, the ferries are also prospering.

Nevertheless, the ugly truth is that new tonnage on order for the United Kingdom fleet is running at an annual rate of about 200,000 tonnes—in other words, at less than the tonnage of just one very large crude carrier. With dropping ship prices and plenty of modern ships on the market, there is no temptation to build anything but specialist ships.

So much for the past and present. What of the future? The bulk carrier and tanker trades are still depressed, but over the past few months, after a vicious struggle in the north Atlantic, the liner trade has been moving into profit in most parts of the world. But just as the horizon begins to brighten storm clouds loom up in the shape of 14 huge new container ships almost twice the size of what is at present considered large, which are owned by United States lines, and of an even bigger fleet of new container ships of slightly smaller size from the Evergreen line of Taiwan.

Both of those lines are starting round-the-world services, increasing world container capacity by about 40 per cent. Whether or not those huge ventures prosper, they must have a devastating effect on rates and hence on the profits of the main world container lines, such as OCL of Britain, which are preparing in various ways to meet this challenge.

We are moving into a world of huge investment in which only the strongest will survive. It is against that background that the Government have to make their Budget decisions and industry must make its business decisions. The main firms in the industry—Cunard, P and O, British and Commonwealth, Ocean and Furness Withy—are not heading for bankruptcy. They are firms with access to capital and they have to decide how to invest it. In recent years that investment has inevitably been in the direction of diversifying away from shipping.

The Government, in turn, will have to decide whether shipping really is to be a special case, with no guarantee that fiscal measures will stop the rot. My hon. Friend the

[Sir Paul Bryan]

Member for Romsey and Waterside has described the fleet's tremendous commercial value, which goes well outside the industry itself. But another obvious justification for Government action might be defence, and an inquiry is already promised. This is surely unnecessary. The General Council of British Shipping is already deeply involved with Government in contingency planning for defence purposes, both in respect of NATO and nationally. There are also two Standing Committees dealing with this issue, and three statistical studies are now in progress.

We shall duly be told that the Merchant Navy is adequate for a Falklands-type operation. But we know that the whole British defence set-up is ideal for such an operation. We probably have the most efficient forces in the world, but they are small and—owing to lack of conscription, recent wars and, in the case of the Navy, a waning merchant marine—we lack reserves. In the Falklands, casualties were light and reserves were uncalled for. We had to use only our crack troops, and the mix of our Merchant Navy, with its accent on cruise ships, ferries and RO/RO ships was particularly suitable. It is in a more protracted campaign, in concert with our allies, that our reducing merchant fleet with its corresponding reducing core of trained personnel will be found wanting.

None of that was taken into account at the last Budget, when, for the first time, shipping lost its status as an exceptional case. By Committee or Report stage of the Finance Bill, even the Treasury was slightly frightened at what it had done and some small concessions were made. However, by then confidence in the industry was badly shaken.

At that time the Chancellor's no-distortion rule was new and shining bright. Since then student grants, pensions and the like have shown that nothing in this political life can remain rigid and survive. Every other country of any consequence is supporting its shipping in one way or another. When Britain did that foreigners invested in our fleets as a flag of convenience. Now the opposite is true. Our shipping is actually discriminated against since it cannot enjoy regional grants, enterprise zones and the other titbits offered to land-based industries.

The GCBS has made its proposals and my hon. Friend listed some of them. In my eyes the most important of these is a ship allowance. To enable companies to write off their ships more quickly, in addition to the 25 per cent. writing-down allowance, there should be a 50 per cent. ship allowance for new and second-hand ships.

The underlying argument is that the continued existence of a substantial British merchant fleet is of sufficient national importance to warrant special assistance. The Chancellor may find help given discreetly through the tax system repugnant. He knows that if the new tax rules are bent even slightly for shipping, he will be besieged with special cases.

If the Chancellor can be persuaded that assistance is required, it may be better if the arguments are discussed openly and any resulting subsidy is explicit. A shipping allowance would come exactly into that category. It would show that the Government were convinced, without doubt, of the importance of shipping. It would do something to restore confidence in the industry.

4.41 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his good fortune in the ballot and on fixing on the merchant service as his subject. I had begun to think that the future of the British merchant marine was a minority interest in the House, although a number of hon. Members, such as the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) and the hon. Members for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), have recently made speeches on the subject.

I am surprised at the Government's attitude because the merchant fleet plays a vital part in defence. Even if the Government were indifferent to the trading and employment aspects of the subject, the connection between the merchant fleet and defence should be in the Government's mind.

The disappearance of the fleet is startling. "Disappearance" is a fair word. People of my generation remember how thin the lifeline was in the early 1940s. My war service was in the Royal Navy, so I am not scratching my own back when I pay tribute to the vital link that the Merchant Navy provided. When one recalls that, one is more than ever surprised at the Government's lack of interest in the erosion of the merchant fleet. We experienced a great humiliation in the Falklands war when we had to charter foreign merchant ships to make up the numbers.

Once we had 50 per cent. of the world's commercial shipping. We are now down to 700 ships or a tonnage of 21 million. The Greeks have more than five times that number in their merchant marine. In 1975, we had 1,614 ships or a 50-million tonnage.

Ships have disappeared to take up flags of convenience for various reasons. I refer to lower taxation, lower manning levels or odd watchkeepers' certificates—where they exist—as opposed to the British mariners' certificate which is demanded under the Red Ensign. Reduced safety regulations elsewhere are also an attraction, but it is a mistake to think that all ships sailing under flags of convenience have lower standards. Some of them are up-to-date.

A restriction applies to our coastal trade. Our so-called partners in the Common Market bar our shipping from their coasts while we have no recourse to the same practice here.

On the invisibles side, the decline of the United Kingdom fleet between 1980 and 1983 reduced the trade balance on sea transport by £1 billion. That is confirmation of what I and some other hon. Members have said for a considerable time—that the Government do not appear to care about the merchant fleet. Their lack of concern has cost the country £1 billion.

In addition, the Chancellor is withdrawing fiscal aid and putting the competitive position of the merchant service at an even greater disadvantage. As the hon. Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) said, the last Budget did considerable damage to the merchant fleet when it proposed the withdrawal of depreciation allowances.

The position of our seamen was made worse in the same Budget by the withdrawal of the allowance on foreign earnings. That can mean as much as £10 for an able-bodied seaman and up to £40 a week for senior masters. Seamen

who work outside the country incur extra expenses; they are away from their homes and do not enjoy the amenities available to people living in the United Kingdom.

That ill-judged imposition will inevitably lead to a demand for bigger pay increases. That will make the position even worse. It will reduce the Merchant Navy's competitiveness, although the Prime Minister told me recently that that was essential for the continued existence of the fleet.

I hope that the Minister will convey to the Chancellor what I have said about the availability of fairer allowances for depreciation and restoration and the overseas earnings allowance.

For a maritime nation, the Government's indifference is astounding. In the last war the deep-sea trawling fleets and experienced seamen were the backbone of the navy. That has gone. The only reserve of trained seamen is in the merchant fleet. Any maritime nation neglects that at its peril. The problem has received little attention in the House. It involves trade, employment and defence. If we neglect those matters, the United Kingdom will be placed at a disadvantage.

4.48 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): It might be convenient if I intervene briefly now. I do not have a declaration of interest to make other than happy memories. I am not a vice-chairman of a shipping company, but I am an ex-able seaman. I joined the Merchant Navy 24 years ago when the size of the British fleet, of the shipbuilding industry and of our port industry was very different. It is a sad reflection on Government policy that we have reached such a terrible state in our shipping, shipbuilding and ports industries.

I thank the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for choosing the plight of the British merchant fleet as the subject for debate today. As he has already reminded us, it comes at an important stage in the development of the decline of British shipping. Unless we take some drastic action, this once proud maritime nation may have no maritime fleet left.

Two years ago, the National Union of Seamen—of which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is the only sponsored Member of Parliament—produced two documents which outlined the dramatic decline of the British merchant fleet. One was entitled "Flags of Convenience" and the other "British Shipping: Heading for the Rocks." I recommend the Under-Secretary to read them both.

It would appear that singularly little action has been forthcoming from the Government on the state in which Britain currently finds itself. That inaction has provoked a storm of protest from the General Council of British Shipping. I note that in the brief that it sent us today it commented that the 1984 Budget was a disaster for United Kingdom shipping.

Mr. Jim Slater, the general secretary of the NUS, wrote to the Prime Minister on 8 November spelling out in the plainest terms—one might say with a touch of mess deck language — the dramatic decline of Britain's merchant fleet, and suggesting remedies to halt that decline.

In the business section of *The Sunday Times* on 2 December, Philip Beresford and John Huxley wrote an article entitled "Britain's abandoned ships." No doubt the Minister read that. There was also an article in *The Guardian* by Andrew Cornelius entitled "Facing a fight to the death." That graphically outlined the problems being faced by British shipping. Given the state of British shipping today, it is hardly surprising that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside, together with his colleague Jonathan Marks — who I understand is a shipbroker and member of the Conservative party — should publish a report entitled "British Shipping—the Right Course." I reiterate that the House should be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for choosing the subject of shipping for today's debate.

I shall do the hon. Gentleman the honour of discussing the report of which he was co-author. I have read it. The report attempts to analyse the reasons for the decline of the fleet and makes recommendations for halting and reversing that decline. Much of the analysis echoes the examination by the NUS of the problems of the United Kingdom shipping industry. Despite some hysterical and factually incorrect sections on manning, collective bargaining and trade unions, the report makes a worthy contribution towards getting the Government to give serious consideration to shipping.

The General Council of British Shipping has reacted to the report in an extremely hostile manner, because it attacks two of the fundamental elements of protection for existing companies involved in shipping — the conference system and the fiscal reliefs peculiar to shipping. It is clear that the authors of the report believe that the GCBS and the shipping companies have, on the one hand, looked for every form of advantage available, including the elimination of competition, but, on the other hand, have publicly espoused free competition.

I believe some of the suggestions in the report to be wrong, but some of its recommendations are certainly worth pursuing. Some of its comments are a direct criticism of the Government's performance thus far. The hon. Gentleman and his colleague outlined graphically the decline of the British fleet and set out certain measures to halt that decline. I shall not bore the House by detailing them, but I subscribe to many of them.

In addition to the points made by the hon. Gentleman in his speech, there has been a process of concentration through the merger of shipping groups, diversification by shipping companies into other areas and a build-up of foreign ownership. Apart from manning restrictions, which I believe to be factually incorrect, the factors mentioned in the report were also identified by the NUS in its pamphlet in 1982. The report demonstrates a belief that the United Kingdom can act alone against these trends. It implies that support for existing shipping companies would not be in the nation's interests.

I wish to quote a number of passages from the report. It states:

"the temptation to go behind the fence to reach bilateral agreements with the developing countries in order to buttress the position of established companies must be resisted . . . If we succumb to [this temptation] we head towards complete regulation of shipping . . . the survival of the British merchant marine depends upon the creation of a broader base of entrepreneurial ship-owners, free from unnecessary and burdensome fiscal and regulatory constraints, and thus in a position to face fair competition and the changing trends of the shipping markets of the world. Government should use its powers to create a fairer environment for international competition."

Mr. Colvin *rose*——

Mr. Stott: I shall give way in a moment.

[Mr. Stott]

Acknowledging that the British people play cricket while other countries play karate, the report's basic solution is that everyone should be persuaded to give up karate and play cricket. That reveals a very slim grasp of the realities of international trade and the commitment of other Governments to protect their interests, rather than the fixation of a single ideology, which I understand from the report is based upon unfettered competition——

Mr. Colvin *rose*——

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman should be patient.

Mr. Colvin: The longer that the hon. Gentleman continues, the more I shall have to answer. He criticised the idea of a wholly regulated market, which is precisely what the bilateral agreement between Britain and Sri Lanka would lead to and which would be anathema to the whole principle of free trading.

The hon. Gentleman failed to acknowledge that in the NUS paper and brief, which I have read, the NUS recommended a totally controlled environment. It wants to control everything. It would nationalise everything—the shipping lines, the shipments, the forwarding agents, the docks and the shipbuilding companies. The whole lot would be integrated on a national state-owned basis. The NUS thinks that that would solve the problem. But it would not. It would lead to retaliation from our competitors overseas. The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that the cross trades are vital to our shipping industry. If we do anything to weaken our position, we will fire the equivalent of more than one Exocet at our fleet.

Mr. Stott: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I do not know to which pamphlet he has referred. The NUS document does not mention the nationalisation of shipping companies. It certainly mentions a firmer degree of Government control, and I go along with that. Prior to the election the Labour party produced a document referring to a national shipping line. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will find what he has suggested in the NUS document.

The hon. Gentleman is not a reluctant critic of the role of the Government. His report states:

"A long-term policy for British shipping is hard to detect. If there is an official view on the structure of the industry, on its tax regime, on its requirements for registration and regulation, it has yet to be made public as a coherent whole."

That is absolutely right.

The report continues:

"A general view has been promulgated neither by Ministers nor officials on the structure of the industry."

Again, the hon. Gentleman is spot on.

The report is critical of a lack of any real regulation over the conferences. It states:

"Despite a political belief"—

that is the belief of the hon. Gentleman and his friend—

"that the conference system is ripe for reform . . . we have accepted the argument that any immediate dismantling of the system would quickly lead to disaster with the break up of much of the fleet and a consequent loss of influence worldwide."

The pamphlet sets out certain suggestions in respect of the conference decisions. I subscribe to the recommendations, which are absolutely right.

The hon. Gentleman talked about cabotage and state aid and said that the Government should be prepared to go to the European Court, if necessary, to ensure that other EEC countries do not breach the treaty of Rome on cabotage. The report makes a dramatic leap from having ended cabotage in Europe to pressing the United States Government to abandon cabotage and reversing Government-generated cargoes to United States flag ships. The demonstrates a degree of naivety. The chances of getting Greece to abandon cabotage are extremely remote, especially now that it is the dominant shipping industry within the EEC. Italy is trying to obtain EEC approval for a package of credit measures that would encourage Italian shipowners to order new ships in Italian yards. The United States Government have categorically stated that they will not alter the principles of the Jones Act, which provides for United States cabotage.

The blind faith of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside in free trade leads him to confuse the ideal world of free trade and entrepreneurial endeavour, which he would like to see, with the real world of shipping. Cabotage exists and will continue to exist in the real world.

Mr. Colvin: When I suggested that it was about time that we talked seriously with the Americans, I went on to explain that we are already taking that approach. As is stated in my pamphlet and as I said earlier, we shall be more capable of acting internationally to try to remove some of the unfair practices of competing nations if we act jointly with our European partners. That is why my question to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was so important. I referred to the shipping policy document that has been produced by the commissioners and I to Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis, who was an Opposition spokesman and who is now a Transport Commissioner. Mr. Davis should be in a strong position to be able to do something about cabotage and the evolution of a common shipping policy. We can tackle the problem of unfair competition elsewhere in the world only if we act in concert with our European partners. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will endorse the idea of a common shipping policy. If he does not, he will sign the death knell of the British merchant fleet.

Mr. Stott: What a tangled web we weave. I do not subscribe to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I do not think that we are likely to achieve any common cause with our European partners, for the reasons that I have outlined. I cannot envisage the Greeks, the Italians, the West Germans or the French agreeing to what the hon. Gentleman proposes. I redirect the hon. Gentleman's mind to a document produced by the NUS in 1984 in which it proposed that, in the first instance, coastal shipping should be regarded as domestic transport. It suggested that it was valid for every nation to reserve its coastal trade for its own flagged ships. However, if the EEC were to adopt new regulations within the terms of the treaty of Rome, it would be more appropriate to lift restrictions within the Community but to reserve the coastal trade to vessels registered within EEC states than to abandon coastal shipping to all comers. That is a proposal that would probably find acceptance.

I support the attack of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside on the Government's taxation measures. That attack has been taken up by others, so I shall not rehearse his arguments on taxation. However, it greatly concerns the shipping industry that it is not treated in a way that would encourage it to keep British ships under the British flag.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside has repeated the analysis that is set out in the document produced by the NUS on registration by acknowledging that foreign investment represents about half the ownership of the United Kingdom fleet. However, rather than seeing this as a source of insecurity and questioning more deeply why United Kingdom investors have been reluctant to put their money into shipping, the hon. Gentleman suggests that the development of a coherent shipping strategy depends on foreign investment. Surely he is aware that the whims of foreign investors are influenced by factors outside the control or influence of the British Government. The abandonment of United Kingdom shipping to their whims hardly demonstrates a commitment to ensure that United Kingdom shipping recovers from its current appalling decline.

The report of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside draws attention to the need to ensure that substandard vessels do not obtain British registration without complying with British safety standards. That is to be applauded. However, the suggestion that more inspection work should be delegated to private sector classification does not make for an adequate system of ensuring that common safety standards are met and maintained.

The hon. Gentleman's pamphlet can be applauded also for its call that eligibility to register vessels should be confined to those over whom jurisdiction can be exercised. However, that contradicts other statements which support flags of convenience operators. Countries which operate the flag of convenience arrangement offer a major attraction, because they do not exercise effective jurisdiction.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to manning. The hon. Gentleman would not expect the Opposition and the NUS to agree to, participate in or countenance levels of manning which would clearly be unsafe. He would not expect us to allow the status of our seamen to be undermined by reducing wages and conditions to levels at which other seamen have to operate. The status of our seamen is a cost to the industry and it is one that the industry has to bear. We cannot, will not and should not be expected to agree to the lowering of the standards that our seafarers have obtained through negotiations with shipowners. We cannot allow that to happen.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside was right when he mentioned the role of the merchant fleet and the defence of the nation. The defensive role of merchant shipping has long been recognised and supported by the Opposition and the NUS. It is to be welcomed that others adhere to the union's position. However, the hon. Gentleman's pamphlet seems not to take into consideration the link between shipping, shipbuilding, ship repairing and Government support in maintaining a defence capability. It is important that we recognise the link.

I apologise to the House for spending some time responding to the issues that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside sets out in his pamphlet. I thought it only right to extend to him the courtesy of demonstrating that I have studied his pamphlet and taken some care in trying to understand what he has written and said. A number of sections are flawed, and I cannot agree with the conclusions that he has drawn in those respects; but his pamphlet and the suggestions that he has made, together with the debate that he has initiated, are to be greatly welcomed.

The decline in British shipping is serious. There is a general recognition throughout the House of that fact. In the last decade, the British merchant shipping fleet has declined from 50 million tonnes to 20 million tonnes. During the past 10 years, the number of seamen working on British ships has been halved to about 37,000. During the past two years, the balance of payments contribution from merchant shipping has been cut in two. The reason is simply that there are too many ships chasing too little cargo. Unfortunately, that is a fact of life.

We have heard and shall continue to hear the appropriate plaudits for our merchant seamen. With some regret I have to say to the Under-Secretary of State that the tax relief measures for our seamen undertaken last year by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget were a pretty poor reward for their service in the Falklands war. I hope that, if the Under-Secretary of State has some influence with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will tell him that that measure went down badly in the shipping world, and certainly with those brave men and women who manned our merchant fleet during that crucial time.

Our merchant fleet is in bad shape. The Government have presided over 4 million of our citizens on the dole and over our industrial decline. Will they preside over the sun setting on the Red Ensign? I very much hope that that will not happen. The House expects the Under-Secretary of State to recognise that there is serious trouble ahead unless the Government do something about it.

5.11 pm

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton): Following the admirable precedents set by the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) and the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), I should like immediately to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his choice of subject. This debate was certainly timely, and I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellent speech to which we had the pleasure of listening. I much appreciate the kindly things he said about the all-party parliamentary maritime affairs group and appreciate his consistent support of that body.

I have a single statement to make and a single question to put. I believe that I shall make common cause with the hon. Member for Wigan, my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside and for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) and the right hon. Member for Western Isles. Indeed, I should be surprised if the House is not unanimous in these matters.

Britain is faced with an alarming decline in her merchant fleet which is now assuming crisis proportions. That is undoubted. The present condition of Britain's merchant navy is the Achilles heel of our economic and defence policy. The question that was posed immediately by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside was: what do the Government propose to do about it? The need for action now — action this day, as Winston Churchill used to say—is undoubted.

Every right hon. and hon. Member who has participated in the debate so far has given the facts. In 1967, the British fleet was the largest in the world; by June 1983 it had dropped to eighth place in the world league, and it is still declining. What is worse, during the past three months no

[Mr. Edward du Cann]

orders for merchant ships have been placed in British yards. Picking up a point made by the right hon. Member for Western Isles, in 1970 Britain had 160 distant water trawlers, last year it had 10, and this year it has none. The loss of trained seafarers is now running at a rate of 5,000 officers and men a year. Educational and training establishments are being closed, and the cadet schemes are virtually extinct. In 1970, the annual number of entrants of engineering cadets was about 1,000; last year it was 70. It does not matter which aspect of the scene one examines —the picture as a whole is horrifying.

It is possible to say that there is a world surplus of ships and shipbuilding capacity and a world recession, as my hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside and for Boothferry pointed out. Of course that is true, but it is only part of the story. Since 1945, world trade has grown eightfold—with 99 per cent. or more carried in ships. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, other nations have substantially expanded their fleets. They include China, Korea and, not least, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside pointed out, Comecon and the Russians.

Soviet Russia is now a formidable maritime state while, in comparison, the United States is a naval power only. The Soviet naval fleet is now larger than the British fleet. Russian warships are second in number only to those of the United States. The Soviet submarine fleet, with 400 ships in service—a new submarine completed every 40 days—is larger than the one Dönitz commanded, which so nearly brought our country to its knees in the 1940s. The Russian fishing fleet—also used from time to time for military purposes—is the largest in the world, as is the Russian fleet of ice-strengthened ships. The Soviet Union's hydrographic capability is by far the greatest in the world while ours—potentially the finest in the world — is disgracefully neglected, as I have often complained. I cannot get out of my mind the words of Admiral Gorshkov:

> "Soviet seapower . . . has become the optimum means by which to defeat the imperialist enemy and the most important element in the Soviet arsenal to prepare the way for a Communist world."

It is not unimportant to ponder those words while we are in the midst of this successful visit, which I greatly welcome, by Mr. Gorbachev.

What about our friends and allies? It is a fact that the United Kingdom's merchant fleet is declining faster than that of any of our allies in NATO or in the European Community. We can, therefore, safely deduce that the dominant cause of the decline of our Merchant Navy is not the recession but the way in which our country has reacted to it.

It has been common ground among every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken in this debate that a national shipping capability is vital in peace time, for numerous good commercial reasons — for instance, its direct contribution to our balance of payments, which is still running as high as £1 billion a year, although, as the right hon. Member for Western Isles pointed out, it had gone as high as £2·5 billion in 1974. Such capability is vital for the security of availability of cargo space, and for some control over freight rates. After all, 98 per cent. of our trade goes by sea.

It would surely be extreme folly to be exclusively or nearly dependent on foreign carriers and to put Britain's life support system in the hands of our competitors, or perhaps even our enemies. This process has already gone pretty far. I cite three instances, one of which was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside when he pointed out that, of 180 supply ships in the British sector of the North sea, only about 100 fly the Red Ensign. Clearly, that is different from the Norwegian sector, as my hon. Friend rightly said. Secondly, believe it or not, three quarters of our oil and gas from Sullom Voe in the Shetlands is carried in foreign ships. Thirdly, in total, less than one third of our imports are now carried in British registered ships. Some may think, as I do, that the process has gone too far already, but there are many indirect reasons for supporting a substantial British Merchant Navy capability. A thriving and substantial British merchant fleet is the key to and basis for a British shipbuilding industry, a British ship repairing industry, a prosperous marine engineering and equipment industry, and substantial invisible earnings in the City through brokerage, insurance and so on.

London is currently the world maritime centre. I believe it to be of great benefit to the United Kingdom that we should maintain that position. In an emergency our national merchant fleet, as the hon. Member for Wigan said, is, in effect, Britain's fourth arm of defence. Its military task is to transport men and supplies; its economic task is to keep our people fed and supplied. Besides that, as the right hon. Member for Western Isles and my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry said, it is the Navy's reserve of manpower. Adverting in particular to what the right hon. Member for Western Isles said, a comparison with the years gone by that he and I remember is interesting. In 1934, there were 200,000 British men at sea upon whom the Navy could call for reserves. Today, there are a mere 45,000

All those benefits to the United Kindgom economy and employment are at risk. They should not be. They need not be. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is a great friend of mine whom I much admire. He is serving our country well in Government. I must tell him that in the face of the most worrying circumstances I regard the inertia and complacency of successive Governments as intolerable. I remember raising the subject on the Adjournment in November 1982 The Minister then replying, who is not now in the House, said that he shared the concern that was expressed. He further said that he would come forward in the almost immediate future with some measures. Nothing happened. Now, even the OECD is sounding a clear warning in its publication "Maritime Transport" which states:

> "OECD Governments . . .must take a more active part in shipping and can no longer rely on the resolution of problems between shippers and ship owners while limiting themselves to the role of observers".

Those are wise words. Someone said to me the other day that he thought the attitude of successive Governments to the provision of the Merchant Navy was the equivalent of the man who leant out of a window halfway up a skyscraper to watch a man falling from the top. As the man who was falling went past him he said, "How are you getting on?" The man replied, "So far, so good."

The Government cannot any longer just stand by. What is the right course for Ministers? I do not believe that policy is difficult to decide. I believe that all in the House

would agree upon it. We should declare loudly and certainly that Britain needs its Merchant Navy. We should accept that the Government have a responsibility to provide the political, diplomatic and fiscal climate in which shipping can survive and prosper.

Now to practical proposals. In the past 25 years—I am sure that we would all agree — shipping has advanced technically, it would seem, about as far as practicable. What with megaships, containerisation, integration with land transport and a substantial reduction in crew numbers, it is right to claim that the industry has done its part. Now, it seems, is the time for Government to back the United Kingdom commercial effort. I say now —I am sure I speak for the whole House—how much the presence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to listen to part of the debate is welcomed.

What does Government backing of the United Kingdom commercial effort mean? I believe that what it means, above all, is all Government Departments acting together. We have listened to a torrent of complaints—I believe entirely justified—about the changes introduced in the last Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, with depreciation and tax allowances for seamen being removed. He could not have hit the industry a harder blow than he did with those two measures.

One is entitled to ask what consultation there was with the Department of Transport before those measures were introduced. What is the Department doing, on its own account, to influence other Government Departments to stop the chartering of foreign ships? What are we doing chartering foreign ships when so many of our seamen are out of work? Adverting to a point that has been made several times already, and which is in the minds of us all, I do not recall seeing Swedish, Danish and Norwegian ships in the Falklands when the Exocets were flying around. Out duty is to support our people.

Like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I believe in the virtues of competition, but what our shipping companies are facing in world markets, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said, is anything but fair competition. For instance, five European Community countries ban United Kingdom ships from their coastal waters while we allow free access. That was a point brilliantly brought out by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) in a question to the Prime Minister a little while ago. Whatever the method is for dealing with it—we have been arguing across the House about it—why do we allow it at all? Why do we allow such a state of affairs to continue? A further 25 nations actively discriminate against British shipping using their ports although, again, their ships use our ports without hindrance. Why do we allow such things to happen?

Discrimination, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside referred, can take many forms. I have a note of about 68 different examples, many by developing countries. It is particularly odious when developing countries discriminate against British shipping when United Kingdom-financed cargoes are being delivered to their shores. Governments all over the world disregard the virtues of fair competition. It is therefore incumbent upon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensure that the Government mount a determined political and diplomatic offensive to counter discrimination.

Retaliation may even be called for. In my view, it is justified in the context of the United Kingdom's present employment position. We should have the courage and realism to do it. Since quotations have been the order of the day, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, who gave a particularly appropriate one, perhaps I could quote John Stuart Mill who said:

"In labouring for one's own country in the right principle we labour for all humanity."

What we need, in a sentence, is a national maritime policy designed to defend and advance the British industry and the British interest. We want that campaign carried forward with imagination and pertinacity. That is the message that will come from the debate. We look to the Government to provide it. I have every confidence that my right hon. and hon. Friends will take that initiative. Heaven knows, in the national interest, it is badly needed.

5.27 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) spoke one significant sentence of which I took note. He claimed that British shipping was facing extinction. That is nothing new for the House to hear. Hon. Members have been saying year in, year out that shipping was facing extinction, but successive Governments have done little or nothing about it. That is a sad fact, but one which we must accept.

On Friday morning I shall be at the Swan Hunter yard in Wallsend. I shall be on board the Atlantic Conveyor to have a final look at that ship before it goes on its maiden voyage. Unfortunately, that is the last merchant ship on the river Tyne, as the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) will confirm. It means that for the first time since the 1930s no commercial shipbuilding will be taking place on Tyneside, and it does not seem as though there is any possibility of receiving any orders within the near future. Therefore, not only merchant shipping but commercial shipbuilding is facing extinction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) asked the Minister a series of questions, during which he placed his finger on the dilemma that faces us. In the House there are basically two distinct political philosophies: one is the virtue of free competition, and the other is the principle of state intervention. Some would call it Socialism but I prefer to call it state intervention. That is the dilemma. The shipping industry is facing the same dilemma as the cotton, textile, machine tool and steel industries and the fishing fleet—I could go on and on. We have not resolved the dilemmas of those industries. For that reason, this country faces a desperate situation with regard to its productive and manufacturing basis.

The Government have distanced, and continue to distance, themselves from those problems. Because of a lack of state intervention, or at least a move by the Government of the day towards a more careful analysis of the problems, we continue to drift. The chances of any good coming out of today's debate are not great, because of the basic philosophy of the Prime Minister herself, so ably backed by some members of her Cabinet. She has often said that one cannot solve a problem simply by throwing money at it. The root cause of the problem is how we finance the British shipping industry in the context of the role that it performs, as has been said by Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Romsey and

[Mr. Ted Garrett]

Waterside. We are no nearer an answer to the problem than we were when I started my political career in the House some 21 years ago.

I am proud to represent Wallsend in the north-east. There are strong and traditional maritime instincts in that area. People not only built the ships, but sailed in them. The port of South Shields, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has the honour to represent, suffered the largest loss of life among men lost at sea in both world wars. Men have also been lost in peacetime, sailing in ships that have provided the lifeline to our nation.

There are training facilities and technical colleges. There is one at Southampton, and one on the north-east coast, at South Shields, where men have been trained for service in the Merchant Navy—marine engineers, radio operators, deck hands and, of course, officers. When they went to sea, those men performed good jobs. They learnt traditional skills, and when their service ended they came ashore to play a highly valued role in industry because of their skills. The mere fact that there will be fewer vacancies for the positions that I have mentioned means that the skills referred to repeatedly in the House over the past few months will go. Is it any wonder that the recently reconstituted Engineering Council has decided to run a series of advertisements emphasising the role of engineering skills, which are so essential to this country's future?

In our shipping industry, this country has been to the fore in introducing regulations to improve safety, and these are being applied more and more in other nations' merchant ships. However, at the end of the day we must believe in ourselves and ask whether we want a shipping industry. The answer is still unclear.

Admittedly other countries are in a worse state than we are, but some are better off. I should like to refer to China. It is appropriate that I should do so, because this afternoon the Prime Minister left on a very important mission to China. China recognises that there is overcapacity in shipbuilding and has delivered a pledge not to disrupt world shipbuilding markets any further. China has told international shipowners and builders that for the time being it does not intend to become a major shipyard power. If that is so, one of the items on the Prime Minister's agenda, in addition to signing the agreement on the future of Hong Kong, should be to ascertain whether there is a market in China and, if so, what aid we can give British Shipbuilders or the private sector to obtain orders from that country.

Some five or six years ago I attended a lunch in the City of London given by the General Council of British Shipping. The then chairman was Peter Walters, who is now the head of British Petroleum. He forecast that there would be a surge of orders by British shipowners because of the aging of the British Merchant Navy. Regrettably, that has not happened, yet the prospects in other countries for more shipbuilding orders are not too bad. It would be foolish to think that no ships are being built anywhere. Many ships are being built in other countries, and we must look more thoroughly at the market; for example, in India.

It is estimated that one third of the Indian merchant fleet of over 10 million tonnes deadweight will be due for replacement by modern fuel-efficient container ships during the seventh plan for the years 1985-90, according to informed sources in New Delhi. I might be straying from the motion, but I am sure that people in British Shipbuilders will read the debate, and I should like them to bear in mind that there is a market there and they can go out and get it. Just as I make no apology for asking for public assistance to get those orders, so I make no apology for asking for direct intervention to save the British shipbuilding industry.

It is often said that if one is a Socialist there is some doubt about whether one is as patriotic as those in the Conservative party, who make great claims to patriotism. But where is the patriotism? It should be applied in view of the simple fact that the British merchant shipping industry is essential to the defence of this country. There is a lack of patriotism by Conservative Members who have to make the decisions about whether we are to have a shipping industry. We cannot carry on just letting industries decline. That has to stop, in the interests not only of the people whose livelihoods are affected but, more importantly, of the whole nation.

Conservative Members who have participated so far in the debate have shown a remarkable awareness of the problem facing the industry, and they have displayed a certain amount of courage when they have had the temerity to criticise the fundamental policy that motivates the Government. If they can change that policy, they will get total support from the Opposition.

5.39 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): The situation is indeed grave. Britain's historical background to its maritime traditions and links is so great that it is staggering that two thirds of the Merchant Navy has disappeared in just nine years. Given that the history of the United Kingdom has been built up on our maritime endeavour, that is indeed staggering. I can only reflect that as a country we have failed to give more attention to the staggering decline in one of our great historical industries simply because employment in it has not been concentrated in particular parts of the country.

I believe that the man in the street—whether he lives at the seaside or inland—believes that Britain needs a Merchant Navy and that there is increasingly national concern about the decline in, and even the collapse of, this industry.

One newspaper recently published interesting figures about the size of individual companies. My father worked for P and O before the war, when I remember that it had more than 200 ships. That was a long time ago, but today P and O has just 24 ships. Furness Withy has 13 ships, Ellermans six, and British and Commonwealth only four. I appreciate that some of these companies are also members of container consortia, but these figures represent a staggering reduction in the British fleet. It is right that the House should debate this subject today, and I join in the congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on choosing it.

Other hon. Members have referred to the reasons for this decline, one of which is the fall in coastal trade. Coastal traffic has practically ceased as a means of communication. In the days when the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) and I were at school, the Tyne was crowded with colliers taking coal to the south. Nowadays that coal goes to power stations near the collieries and is conveyed by electric line to the south of the country.

Britain now trades far more with Europe, and consequently less of our home trade is taken on long-distance journeys by sea. Less oil is now brought into the country from overseas. Every 1 million tonnes of additional output from the North sea means that one tanker fewer is required. Some tankers are still needed to carry oil from some of the wells to the ports, but the oil also comes ashore by pipeline, and we should contrast the demand for tankers to bring the oil ashore from a few miles out in the North sea with the demand required to bring it around Africa from the Gulf. That sector has also witnessed a great fall in demand.

Container ships are now being made more efficient than the ships they replaced. As well as being larger, each spends only a short time in port. In the old days the ships spent a long time in port, but those days have gone because container ships unload in 24 hours and are off again. One such ship now does the job of seven or eight of its predecessors.

The world depression has also had an effect on our trading situation. The first effect was on the tanker industry, when a flood of cheap ships from the low-wage shipyards of the far east were bought up in vast numbers. Having destroyed the tanker market, those shipyards began to construct bulk carriers, with the result that that sector was also destroyed. We have heard earlier in the debate about the way in which the container business is in turn about to be affected by a vast over-expansion in the number of container ships. Huge fleets of new container ships are ready to come into service in the near future, and one of the sectors that is still doing quite well will be badly affected.

World trade by sea has grown by 28 per cent. in 14 years, but in that time the tonnage of ships available to carry the trade has more than doubled. That has had an appalling effect on freight rates, which are now lower than six years ago. While 1984 was a bad year for world shipping, and for western shipping in particular, it looks as though 1985 will follow the same sad pattern.

Several hon. Members have referred to the defence implications of the Merchant Navy, and it is on that that I wish to concentrate. The developments in the Falkland Islands a couple of years ago dramatically focused attention on the requirements for the Merchant Navy. There is, however, a danger that as time passes we shall lose impetus. It is, therefore, with relief that I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence on setting up an inquiry into the adequacy of the Merchant Navy in a war or crisis. I hope that that inquiry will investigate "out of NATO area" operations as well as operations in the north Atlantic. Should some terrible circumstances again require Britain to act alone—God forbid that it will ever happen—we shall have to look to our own resources. We shall be unable to count on our NATO allies in that situation.

During the Falklands crisis, 20 product tankers were sent south to support the Royal Navy. At that time, BP had 25 or 30 such ships in its fleet. I understand that now it has only eight, far fewer than would be needed to support another Falkland Islands operation. There has been a particularly critical fall in the number of specialist ships.

Some figures about shipping requirements in the event of a crisis in Europe are freely available in America—though not perhaps in this country. I understand that 1·5 million men would be flown across the Atlantic, but their equipment would have to come by sea. Further, 8·5 million tonnes of stores plus 10 million tonnes of fuel would have to be brought across the Atlantic. That would require 2,000 shiploads a month. On top of that, a similiar requirement would be needed to maintain the civilian and industrial life of Europe. These are enormous figures, and it is right that the Government should now be inquiring into the continuing capability of the Merchant Navy to play its part in dealing with such a crisis.

Manning would be a particular problem in a crisis. The number of our people at sea has nearly halved in the last 10 years, and is falling at the rate of about 5,000 a year from its present level of 41,000. As we have heard, the number of cadets recruited is also causing great concern. At one time, 1,000 cadets a year were recruited, but it is now a fraction of that number. Therefore, we shall be unable to produce the officers of the future.

It is no good having ships available under flags of convenience which could be requisitioned at a time of crisis if there is no one to man them. It could well be that the existing foreign crews would refuse to sail into particularly hazardous waters, and we might have to rely on our own sailors.

Given the present state of oversupply, with 1,400 surplus ships laid up in the world's ports, it is easy to acquire a second-hand ship cheaply. It is therefore important to do everything we can to maintain the safety of international shipping operations. I very much welcome the recent increase in the number of port inspections. There are now about 10,000 inspections a year, and the need for them is highlighted by the fact that well over 13,000 defects were discovered. No fewer than 430 ships inspected were detained or delayed because they had serious deficiencies. That was 6 per cent. of all the ships inspected. Clearly, that effort needs to be maintained.

The main cause of the problems in the British Merchant Navy is the protectionism of the developing world, which uses its own fleets to gain hard currency and to develop an industry. Those countries gain great advantage from their cheap labour. There is no doubt that this will be a permanent problem for Britain and the other western ship-owning countries. The same applies to much of manufacturing industry, but the problem is highlighted at sea.

Recently I spoke to the manager of a foreign-owned company which still operates from London. On ships registered under the Red Ensign, crew costs account for two thirds of the income, while on ships registered in Liberia or one of the other flags of convenience countries the crew costs account for only one third of the income. That kind of difference highlights the great problems when operating under the Red Ensign, as we all wish.

Turning to specialist ships, the difference in crew costs is not so much a factor. Crewing costs can be the least of the requirements when providing a complex service, whether it be container ships, gas carriers or other specialist vessels. Countries such as Britain are still able to compete in providing ships of that kind.

What can we do for the future? We can try to be more efficient. We can cut crews. I do not believe that this will in itself solve the problem, but we have to do all we can to be as efficient as possible. In recent years there have been quite dramatic falls in the size of crews. A ship which a few years ago had a crew of about 60 has been replaced by a ship with a crew of 31. That in turn will be replaced by ships which are now being built for crews of about 21. Japan is talking seriously about operating large ships with

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

crews as low as 12. Technology will bring further changes in the manning of ships. However, that will not deal with the magnitude of the problems that have been outlined in the debate.

If I may deal with subsidies, I do not believe that British shipowners seek to be subsidised. However, they say with great justification that they are at a disadvantage compared with other western operators and even more with the countries of the eastern bloc which pay no regard to normal commercial factors. I trust that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport will refer in his winding-up speech to the discussions that have taken place with the Soviet Union on the passenger cruise liner sector of the industry, which has been so harmed by competition from the non-profitmaking, subsidised Soviet merchant navy, the size of which has been so well portrayed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) who, again, made a strong case for the Merchant Navy.

What can we do to provide our shipowners with at last the same financial assistance as is given by their western competitors? I support fully what has been said about the negative nature of the Budget changes that have been made this year and the suggestion made by the GCBS that the fleet should be allowed, in addition to the 25 per cent. writing-down allowance, a 50 per cent. ship allowance for new and second-hand ships. Nothing less than that will encourage the investment that is so desperately needed.

The hon. Member for Wallsend referred to the fact that he and I have been invited to go on board Atlantic Conveyor later this week. It is sad indeed that we should these days be talking about individual new ships, not fleets of ships. One ship today is a great achievement for both the shipbuilders and the shipowners of Britain. It is indeed tragic that when Atlantic Conveyor sails there will not, for the first time in centuries, be a merchant ship being built on the Tyne. We must do everything we can to encourage shipowners to continue to invest. The financial state of their industry is so bad that they cannot invest without tax relief. If they are not asking for operating subsidies they should at least be given tax relief. The lack of incentive and of help to our shipowners makes Britain unique. It needs to be put right.

I come to the problems of navigation, and the ports around our coasts. They have the greatest effect upon the British Merchant Navy since it is the British Merchant Navy that uses our ports most. Pilotage is a matter that deserves a separate debate. I welcome the recent publication of a Green Paper on that difficult subject. Ships coming to this country can be charged £12,000 for light dues, whereas if they go to continental ports they pay nothing at all. This leads to ships avoiding Great Britain and to traffic being diverted from our ports to western European ports, with goods being brought on to Britain on cross-Channel ferries. This results in a further adverse effect upon our deep-sea shipping fleet.

I was at Southampton recently. It was a sad sight. That great port has eight container channels. Not one container was to be seen there. The whole trade of the port has gone. While that is harmful to Britain and surely disastrous for Southampton, it must certainly also be bad for the British Merchant Navy if ports of that magnitude are closed down by the lunatic action of the labour force. I say to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport that the dock work labour scheme must be given further attention by the Government in the interests of those who work in the industry as much as of those in the Merchant Navy.

One of the problems is the lack of co-ordiation between Ministries. That is not through any lack of goodwill or intent. It is just the result of the history of Government in this country. I do not believe it to be sensible that the vital question of labour relations in the ports should not be handled by the same Ministry as deals with the Merchant Navy.

The efficiency of ships can be helped by improvements in fuel efficiency and design. I welcome the efficient ship project, which the Government are supporting, but I repeat that there will be no investment in new ships unless there are Budget changes. The inadequacies of the present system must be put right in the next Budget.

I believe that this will not be the end of the matter for this House. A maritime league has been formed in this country, consisting of eminent people who deal with every aspect of maritime life. It will continue the battle for the Merchant Navy. There is a maritime affairs committee in the House. It is on an all-party basis and is chaired admirably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton. It will not go away, either.

I am sure that we shall return to this subject. The message that has to go out from our debate today is that as a first step the Treasury must accept the need to give assistance in the next Budget to our shipowners. It is absolutely vital that this message should be taken on board.

5.57 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I am pleased to follow the hon. Members for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), because I know a little about the technical college which trains Merchant Navy officers and personnel at South Shields. Until recently my daughter taught there. She conveyed to me the depressing nature of the rundown in numbers and the virtual closure of that college, which has played such a great role over many years.

I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on choosing this subject for debate. It is important that we should discuss these matters —in particular the dramatic decline in the strength of our Merchant Navy and the continual rundown of our shipyards.

As has been mentioned, since 1975 the number of ships in our merchant fleet has more than halved. The number has gone down from 1,600 to only 700. Between 1977 and 1980 about 24,000 jobs were shed in British shipyards, and many more have disappeared since then. More shipyards have been closed and there have been continual lay-offs. A great number of lay-offs are taking place at the moment, not only in the north-east, but in Southampton, at Vosper Thornycroft, a very modern shipyard which I believe should never have been nationalised. No new orders at all were received by British shipyards between July and September.

However, I welcome, as I am sure the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) also welcomes, the recent order which has been placed by British Steel for a bulk carrier at Harland and Wolff. My inspection of Harland and Wolff leads me to believe that

it is as superbly equipped a shipyard as any in the Western world. That at least is one piece of good news. Every effort must be made to keep Harland and Wolff in operation.

Fiscal measures relating to taxation would help the shipowners of this country. I shall not repeat what has already been said. I support the GCBS proposal for a 50 per cent. ship allowance, not only for new but for second-hand vessels.

The "British Shipping Review 1984" says that Norway, Denmark and Japan provide extended periods of finance for up to 10 or 12 years, with initial grace periods of two to three years. While those schemes may have been devised to help domestic shipbuilders, obviously British shipowners have had some benefit from that. There is a host of examples of the sort of help given in West Germany, the Netherlands and many other parts of the world.

Does this country really want to opt out of owning a merchant fleet or building any more ships? Some operators in the City believe that we cannot compete and that, therefore, we should order all our ships from Taiwan—I have seen the very impressive shipyard there—Japan or Korea and perhaps merely fit out ships in this country.

That view was put to me by a City shipowner—I shall not name him—when I suggested where he might order his new ferry. The Under-Secretary may guess where it will be operating to and from. The Robb Caledon yard had just closed, and it seemed to me that such an order would be a great opportunity to reopen the yard. He said that I must be mad if I thought that he could get a ship built on competitive terms in a British yard. He said that the order would go perhaps to Scandinavia, but probably to the far east and that all that a British yard could do would be to fit out the ship.

That view is far too defeatist and must be resisted. The Government must help. I welcome the establishment of the all-party maritime affairs committee under the distinguished chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann), who spoke so knowledgably earlier. However, we are late on the scene. As a member of the committee, I pledge that we shall maintain the pressure until we see an upturn in our merchant fleet.

I congratulate the Government on facing reality in their Green Paper on maritime pilotage. That remark will probably not go down too well in my constituency, because a number of pilots live there, but the Government cannot opt out of the compensatory redundancy payments that will inevitably arise. The Green Paper says:

> "The Government propose that as a matter of mechanics the cost of the scheme should be met from a levy on harbour authorities, which would be recoverable from a special charge on shipowners."

We made a previous attempt to get some sense into pilotage, and it was accepted that 600 or more pilots might be made redundant. At that time, it was thought that redundancy payments would average about £80,000 per pilot. The shipowners said that they could not meet such sums, and it is hardly likely that they will be able to do so today when the situation is so much worse. There is a case for what the Government have set out in the Green Paper. However, the terms will have to be generous if we are to get a sensible settlement. A three-way split between the state, port authorities and shipowners is surely the right way forward.

Like other hon. Members, I am depressed by what I have seen across the water from my constituency, in Southampton. The actions of some dockyard workers and their colleagues in that port are, as was said earlier, sheer lunacy. They have put in jeopardy the jobs of too many innocent bystanders, whose livelihoods depend on a vigorous, modern, well-run port complex. Many Southampton operators have moved to Felixstowe, and one has even gone back to Liverpool. Perhaps we should give a cheer for Liverpool, but if Southampton has put itself in the same league as Liverpool, I deeply regret it.

Southampton has all the advantages: excellent facilities, four tides a day, and so on. Regrettably, the workers have committed suicide, and they have taken many pilots, tug owners and launch supply operators with them. That has had an effect in my constituency. Even taxi drivers in Southampton complain bitterly. The whole economy of Southampton has been affected.

A new attitude is required if we are to put matters right. We need a competitive port with a sustained record of industrial peace. Otherwise, shipowners from abroad will not come to our ports. We need to make proper use of modern technology and end overmanning, though with adequate redundancy terms.

As has been said repeatedly in the debate, we need the Government to provide a more sympathetic tax regime and financial help over the next few years similar to that which is so readily available to our competitors. We want fewer crippling charges imposed on shipowners and a determined effort to encourage people to buy British and to repair ships in British yards.

I tried today to get a copy of the evidence given to the Select Committee on Defence by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, but I gather that it has not yet been published, so we cannot read what was said. The hon. Gentleman was dealing with the role of the merchant fleet in support of the Royal Navy in times of crisis, and what I have heard secondhand is not reassuring. Therefore, I hope that the Under-Secretary will say more about the issue when he replies to the debate.

I welcome the inquiry that is to be set up, but it is far too late. We know what the inquiry will show, and if we wish to save our merchant fleet we must take action now.

6.6 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I shall not follow what the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) said about the problems of the dock industry in Southampton, though we could have a fruitful debate on that subject alone.

I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his success in the ballot and on his choice of subject. It must be clear to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport that the House is disturbed by the decline in the size and scope of the British merchant marine.

Various figures have been bandied about, but I prefer the simpler and more homely statistic that our fleet has been declining by two ships a week—we have seen the fleet stealing away into the mist—and it is continuing to decline.

Every hon. Member has asked the simple question: is it in the national interest that there should have been such a decline and that the decline should continue? The answer from every hon. Member has been a firm no.

The message from the debate is that, although we all have our own solutions, we agree that in the national interest the present situation must not continue. In saying

[Sir David Price]

that I must declare an interest, because my constituency, which surrounds Southampton and includes a corner of the city, is deeply involved in the shipping industry and I have professional contacts with the industry.

No hon. Member has yet discussed the Government's policy as they have stated it. It has been suggested that the Government do not have a policy but I know that they have one, because it was spelt out to me by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in reply to a question from me earlier this year. My right hon. Friend told me:

"The Government will continue to fight strenuously for the widest and fairest possible opportunities for British merchant shipping to compete in the shipping markets of the world. The industry's future will depend mainly on the use it makes of those opportunities, and thus on the enterprise of our shipowners and seafarers. These have always been the main factors in the industry's fortunes."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. *375*.]

How far have the Government succeeded in achieving the laudable objective set out in the first sentence of that answer?

The annual report of the GCBS states:

"Non-commercially operated shipping from Soviet bloc countries continues to cause major problems in many important liner trades and in the UK cruise market by grossly undercutting British and other Western operators."

There should be an agreement with the NUS about that. I am sure that Jim Slater would agree that the Soviet bloc has been undercutting.

The report continues:

"Moreover, in the liner trades, a deluge of new tonnage is about to fall on the market. Highly subsidised either by the shipowning or shipbuilding country, in some cases operated by companies based in countries which restrict access to their own trades, these ships will operate almost exclusively as cross-traders. Many will be manned and operated from relatively prosperous newly industrialised countries, where trade unions show modest aspirations for their members.

Hence they will have substantial cost advantages over operators from European countries of comparative affluence."

I speak as a former Minister at the Board of Trade, and it is clear to me that that in ordinary language means dumping. We must therefore use some form of anti-dumping legislation against them. I am without doubt in favour of action. Obviously, the action is better done if we can do it on a European basis. I am glad to tell the House that from my information the Commission of the European Community is well seized of that matter and is well on the way to producing a shipping policy to put before the Council of Ministers. I commend what I have seen of it in draft form.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I only wish to say I received it on Wednesday and that I agree.

Sir David Price: When my hon. Friend replies to the debate, I hope that he will support what is being proposed in Brussels. Broadly, the message is that the time has come when we must collectively take action against unfair competition, and that it is better done collectively than individually. Therefore, I hope that the Government will give the new policy their full support.

In the meantime, European countries would be in a better position to take such action if they lived by anti-discrimination within Europe. Many hon. Members, especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann), referred to my efforts this summer to demand action against our so-called partners in Europe for not allowing free access to their coastal waters. My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) suggested that there had been a great decline in coastal shipping. I remind him that coastal shipping round our own coasts carries in terms of tonne-mileage 2·8 times more freight than is carried by rail. It is second only to transport by road as the main United Kingdom carrier of freight. I commend to the House the figures that I received in reply to a question that I put to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 25 June. Coastal shipping is increasing, not declining, largely because of the moving of oil products.

Mr. Trotter: I referred to the 1930s, when there were between 50 and 70 colliers on the Tyne, and at a small port like Blyth between 30 and 40. Now the figures would be two or three for that particular trade.

Sir David Price: There has been an increase in fuel technology, and in those days there were no large coastal refineries. What we have lost in coal we have gained in oil. I repeat that coastal shipping is the second most important method of moving freight around our kingdom.

With regard to the extension of the Community to include Spain and Portugal, if we have free cabotage for British shipping within the EC, the Atlantic ports and the whole of the northern Mediterranean coast will be open to our coastal traders. That would be a great bonus to British coastal shipping. When my hon. Friend replies, I look forward to repeated assurances in addition to those which he has already given me that in the Council of Ministers we shall fight for British rights of coastal access.

I deal next with other forms of appropriate Government aid within the context of free trading and an open seas policy, which the industry and I support. I agree with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends that the Chancellor's measures in the last Budget were not helpful. I hope that some effort will be made to reverse them. It is perfectly legitimate to ask for appropriate tax treatment of capital in the next Budget. The Minister knows that the industry has been making representations about that. I know that this is not the occasion to advance detailed arguments, but I hope that he will give the general idea a fair wind. Similarly, current shipping costs are largely crew and fuel costs. The impact of crew costs can be assisted through favourable taxation treatment. I shall not develop the point further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth referred to the problem of lights, and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight commended, as I do, the new proposals on pilotage. However, there is a problem of charges. In a perfect world it is right that the charges should be borne by the industry, but in an imperfect world the industry finds them hard to bear, especially as none of its competitors must bear them. That point is not fully appreciated. The main users of lights are not the merchant fleet, but private yachtsmen. Merchant ships are so well equipped with navigational aids that they need lights less than they did in the past. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend will consider further the lights problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth wisely said that the Merchant Navy is the fourth arm of defence. However, both its size and mix are matters for its effective support of the Royal Navy. Even more critical is the time scale of the decline both in absolute terms and in the mix of the fleet. I suspect that the admirals who do their sums

assume that what is on the books now will be on the books in four years' time. However, given the trends that many hon. Members have described to the House, that cannot be a certain assumption.

There is also the question of flagged-out ships which may be under beneficial ownership from this country. There is no certainty whether the crews of those ships will be available in an emergency. That deserves more study than it has so far been given.

Thought should be given to providing some sort of financial arrangements to companies which commit their ships to the Ministry of Defence, similar to that which exists for people—a ship version of the Royal Naval Reserve. There should also be a form of bounty for reserved ships. That would be a legitimate way of giving a little modest help to British shipping companies at this difficult time.

The decline of the British Merchant Navy has reached disturbing proportions. It must be halted and reversed. I invite the Government so to do. Although this is Christmas time, I do not ask the Government to emulate Santa Claus, only to be wise men.

6.18 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for initiating this important debate. The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) talked about the colliers on the river Tyne. I can remember colliers, Blue Star boats, city boats and tankers lying three or four abreast, but now there are virtually no ships to be seen.

My area designs, builds, sails and maintains ships. The Royal Navy cannot be divorced from the merchant fleet, nor the capacity to build and maintain the fleet. I agree with the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) that we require a maritime policy. We have asked for a maritime policy on many occasions in the House, and the Select Committee on Trade and Industry recommended it in 1981. Britain must be the only maritime nation that has no maritime policy.

I was born in Jarrow, which was a shipbuilding town, and from the day I was born I was meant to work in the shipyards, just as someone born with a silver spoon in his mouth is meant to go to Eton. My grandparents and father were shipyard workers, and I was always being told how important seagoing was. I was told a tale about a Mr. Jenks who used to deliver manure by horse and cart. He did so, despite the arrival of gas turbine motor cars, jet aircraft and spaceships, because he discovered that with his horse and cart he could deliver manure with an economy and a certainty that pleased his customers and repaid him. Manure for the fields of England and food and goods for the rapidly increasing number of under-fed people in the world need neither missiles, spaceships nor jets; just a safe and certain means of transport so that the cost can be kept as low as possible.

If Mr. Jenks' horse became a Pegasus and grew wings, it might be able to lift about 15 lb of books from the Table and carry them through the air. However, if we taught the horse to swim, it could probably tow 50 or 60 hon. Members through the sea. Horse power is extremely important. It is important to realise that it could take 15 lb by air, but 9,000 lb by sea.

The need for a navy stems principally from the possession of a merchant fleet and the need to ensure that merchant ships have unhampered passage through the world's sea routes. General Galtieri taught Britain a lesson about the importance of surface ships and a merchant fleet; 54 merchant ships were in the task force that went to the Falklands. Everyone, from the Prime Minister upwards, or downwards—it depends how one looks at it—realised the importance of our merchant fleet. Yet, since the Falklands crisis, there has been a reduction of 200 ships in the merchant fleet. During the NATO exercise Operation Lionheart we had to charter foreign vessels.

There has been much publicity recently about the Royal Princess, which was built in Finland. It was a tragedy and a disgrace that British Shipbuilders did not tender for that ship, which is one of the finest passenger ships sailing the oceans.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the fact that the 1984 Budget was a disaster for United Kingdom shipping. The first thing that the Treasury should do is to put that right by introducing 100 per cent. fair share allowances and free depreciation, not by removing the 25 per cent. tax relief for seafarers, as is promised in next year's Budget.

In 1975, the United Kingdom fleet had 1,600 ships and a dead weight tonnage of 50 million. Now it has 700 ships and a dead weight tonnage of 18·5 million. To maintain it at that level would require new orders for 1 million tonnes every year. If new orders for 1 million tonnes were placed in British shipyards, we would not have problems such as we have in the shipbuilding industry. As the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside said, for the past nine years we have been losing two ships a week. That has happened not simply because of a decline in freight orders, but because of containerisation and the fact that British trading patterns have become increasingly dominated by Europe. For many years I worked on refrigerated vessels that took fruit and meat from Australia, New Zealand and South America, but those ships no longer come to our shores.

When the merchant ships returned from the Falkland Islands bands were playing,

"Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves."

If the Government do nothing about the decline in the shipping industry we will not even break the waves, let alone rule them.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside, referring to protectionism, said that, while Britain was playing cricket, the rest of the world is engaged in karate. As an ex-boxer, I would say that, while Britain is fighting according to the Marquess of Queensberry's rules, the rest of the world is engaged in all-in wrestling. We do not have an open market. The Government must do something about the decline in shipping, shipbuilding and engine-building industries, which are important to an island nation. In a world two thirds of which is covered by water and 98 per cent. of whose trade is carried by sea, it is important that something be done immediately.

6.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I am glad to have the opportunity of responding to the motion that was so ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). In the terms of his motion, he recognises the importance of shipping to our trade and our defence, and the importance of our fleet in its own right. I agree with him. It is overlong since the House gave time to this important industry. It is perhaps surprising that the Opposition have not chosen the indusry as the subject of

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an Opposition debate, so I am doubly grateful to my hon. Friend for choosing this subject. The motion follows his recent valuable contribution to the debate about the future of the United Kingdom merchant marine in the document produced by the Centre for Policy Studies entitled, "British Shipping — the Right Course." The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) paid tribute to that document, although he did not agree with everything that it said.

The Government naturally share the concern expressed in the debate by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the decline of the United Kingdom merchant fleet. It has been a cause of understandable concern to me and my colleagues, as I know it has been to seafarers and their unions, the shipowners, the General Council of British Shipping, and to others concerned with our island's interests and our maritime history.

The decline in the merchant fleet looks especially dramatic if it is measured against the exceptionally high figure to which the fleet had grown in 1975. It may be useful to the House if I restate some basic facts about our fleet. Its high reputation, the skills that are brought to bear by the officers and men who man our ships, and the high calibre of the ships are all known and give us a world-wide reputation. But it is perhaps sometimes overlooked that, despite the decline, the United Kingdom fleet is the seventh largest in the world. That puts us well above our natural position in relation to our total trade. Among European fleets we rank as third, and within the EC as second. Therefore, although I recognise fully the deep concern which the Government share about the decline in the fleet, it is right to put it in perspective.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside was right to draw attention to the various roles in which the merchant fleet is involved. It is clear from the debate that the House shares his anxiety in three areas: first, in terms of enabling us to carry on our import and export trades where we are so dependent on the sea and ships for bringing in and taking out so much of our trade; secondly, the vital area of defence, which several hon. Members mentioned; and, thirdly, the realisation that the United Kingdom fleet is a major national asset, a major investment, a source of jobs and an industry in its own right.

Perhaps I may mention the projections about the rate of decline of the United Kingdom fleet. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to projections that would lead to the fleet's being extinguished. The General Council of British Shipping has suggested that the 700 vessels which now form the United Kingdom-owned and registered fleet will have fallen to 400 by 1986. Others, further projecting the current rate of decline, declare that by the year 2000 there will be no United Kingdom fleet. Even the hon. Member for Wigan who spoke on behalf of the Opposition, referred to the time when there would be no fleet left. It is far too simplistic just to extrapolate the recent level of the decline and suggest that there is an inevitable progression to the sort of figures that have been spoken about. I do not demur from the concern expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) about this matter. He is chairman of the all-party maritime group, and I hope that we can have discussions about this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) will know that I am not responsible for shipbuilding. However, does he not recognise some inconsistency when he complains about uneconomic freight rates, because of the glut of shipping, in the same breath as he calls for subsidies for shipyards to build more ships, even in his constituency? The truth is that the fleet is not a single fleet; it is many separate fleets. For the House to judge the seriousness of the decline, where it comes, where the shoe is to pinch and what the causes are, we need to look more closely at the different mini-fleets that make up the total of the United Kingdom merchant marine against the background of the changes in our pattern of trade, which themselves lead to a different demand pattern for our fleets. For example, the change to membership of the Common Market has meant that a much larger proportion of our trade is no longer long distance, to the Commonwealth, but is on short haul from the east coast to European ports.

I commend to the House the analysis of the reasons for the decline given by my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight. He analysed brilliantly, as one might have expected from his experience of the industry, what is going on. He said that seven or eight ships of the old fleet are now replaced by one container vessel. That is one of the many signs of the extent to which there are forces at work that are not within the control of any Government and that are leading to a decline in the number of vessels.

The development of containerisation has meant fewer and larger ships with smaller crews, and the oil crisis of a decade ago has had a dramatic effect on the pattern of the oil trade. For example, 55 per cent. of all the tonnage lost over the last decade—the largest proportion of all reductions in the United Kingdom merchant marine—has been in tanker tonnage. That has not been through any failure on the part of the Labour party when it was in government or of this Government. Principally, the tonnage has fallen because the world trade in oil shrank with high prices and we became self-sufficient from North sea oil being brought ashore by pipeline.

The huge surplus of tankers looks as if it may be coming to an end. One can contrast that with what has happened with regard to containers. We have one of the largest container fleets in the world, but Evergreen and United States Lines are proposing giant, round-the-world, minimum stop operations, which will present a huge challenge to our fleet. The prospect of a freight war developing, with massive surplus tonnage, is horrifying. My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) referred to its devastating potential.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton will accept that there are many complex factors at work in the decline of our fleet. Happily, roll-on/roll-off and ferries are operating in a more buoyant and steady market, which shows that, while the total size of our fleet has declined and some further decline is on the cards, it would be wrong to extrapolate the figures of the past decline and assume that we shall end up with nothing.

The Government's strategy falls into three parts, all of which were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside. First, there is the need of our island for ships to import and export goods; secondly, there is our defence strategy; and, thirdly, there is the help and encouragement that we can give to our ship operators. The House may expect me to start by saying that we must have a fleet of a given size to be able to carry goods to and

from the United Kingdom, but that is not the case. Our fleet is important because of the jobs and the overseas earnings that it provides in itself. However, in terms of our imports and exports, the important factor, which relates directly to our competitive position and therefore to our national need, is that we should have efficient shipping services, able to get in and out of our ports with the minimum of burdens, to enable our exporters to compete. That is true in the changed pattern of trade, as so much of it lies with Europe. Our principal competitors are in Europe where they have land frontiers, while everything that we have has to be dragged across the sea and through our ports.

In this connection, it is important that we should minimise the burdens that are imposed on our shipping industry and those who use our ports. We have a continuing dialogue with the General Council of British Shipping about the burdens imposed by the Government, and we are seeking to do what we can to minimise them. For example, the cost of lighthouses and buoys around our shores is an expensive burden, amounting to £43 million a year, which is paid by ships using our ports. For some time, shipowners and the Public Accounts Committee have expressed concern as to whether the money was being most effectively spent. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that Trinity House has now invited the Government to nominate four business men to serve on the reformed Lighthouse Board, which has responsibility for this function under Trinity House.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a case, in equity, for those charges falling not just on shipowners? My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) mentioned that these facilities are used most by yachtsmen, and the whole country benefits from having a safe maritime regime. Is it not possible for this cost to fall on the Exchequer rather than directly on shipowners?

Mr. Mitchell: On the total burden of lighthouse costs, Trinity House will welcome the addition of four distinguished business men on to the Lighthouse Board, which is involved with the administration of the service. That should lead to an assurance to the shipping community that there will be good value for money in the handling of the money that goes into the fund.

My hon. Friend raises a different point, which concerns not the totality of the expenditure, and therefore the totality that would be raised, but the distribution of it as between the commercial shipping, shipping and yachtsmen. We have identified this as a significant problem. There is an apparent unfairness about it. I understand the misgivings that the GCBS has expressed on this matter. We have commissioned a firm of management consultants to look into matter, and I expect to have its report early in the new year. I shall report to the House on what its recommendations are. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that that will cover the points that he raised about yachtsmen.

Mr. Donald Stewart: In view of the comparatively small sum involved, and as the whole rescue service is borne by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, it would be a welcome contribution if the Government would bear the cost of lighthouses and buoys.

Mr. Mitchell: It would be nice for all of us if the Government had a bottomless pit out of which they could finance endless numbers of goodies. We would not then need to argue late into the night the relevant merits of spending money on kidney machines or lighthouses. However, in many sectors it has long been established that it is right and proper — and in this regard it has happened under all Governments—for the users of the service to pay for it rather than the general taxpayer. If that is a view that the right hon. Gentleman feels should be debated when the report is received from the consultants, I have no doubt that he will initiate an opportunity to do so.

Another burden is that of pilotage. I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) for our proposals for the reform of pilotage in the United Kingdom. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) for his support.

Pilotage is another very substantial cost which has to be paid by ships coming to and going from our shores. It is quite right that we should give the highest possible priority to ensuring the safety of vessels coming in and going out of our ports. In a Green Paper that we published at the end of last week, we announced significant changes which will make for a more cost-effective service while in no way endangering the safety of vessels. It will give to the ports responsibility for pilotage as one of the services provided within ports. These proposals are being cautiously welcomed by the General Council of British Shipping and by Trinity House, which sees it as a new challenge as it will be able to tender for the work around our coasts. Concern has been expressed by the pilots themselves, and I look forward to hearing the response of the British Ports Association.

Another burden to which attention has been drawn is the cost of moving ships into the United Kingdom flag. A good deal of work has been done to reduce that cost and to make it possible for vessels to flag-in more easily. But my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to further barriers, and I shall be grateful if he will write to me about them so that I can look at them more closely.

A number of the hon. Members drew attention to the tax position of British fleets. I shall ensure that what they said is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside also asked me about conference loyalty arrangements. We have given much thought to the proposal that the postponed EEC competition regulation should prohibit conferences from enforcing loyalty arrangements in respect of more than 70 per cent. of shippers' custom. In our consideration we have taken account of the many views expressed to us, but I can now announce that we no longer intend to pursue this proposal.

Widespread anxiety has been expressed about our defence needs. I have been asked whether we would ever again be able to mount that which was done at the time of the Falklands in terms of merchant marine support for the Royal Navy. I have been asked about our NATO reinforcement ability and the needs of the Ministry of Defence. The hon. Member for Wigan referred to the cross-party recognition of the importance of these matters. We should seek where we can to ensure that these matters are not unnecessarily involved in the party political dogfight.

There is a continuing dialogue between the Department of Transport and the Ministry of Defence, in which the

[Mr. Mitchell]

latter identifies its needs, and my Department has the task of ensuring that those needs are supplied. At the moment there is no reason to suppose that we are unable to supply those needs in one way or another. But that begs the question about what will happen in the years ahead if the decline in our fleet continues. For this reason, we have obtained from the Ministry of Defence its forecasts of its needs at varying times over the next few years and in 1992. Having its detailed analysis, we are now going out to consultants. A contract has been placed to see whether the vessels required at those forward dates will be available.

Should we find that some years ahead we are unlikely to meet particular needs, various possibilities are open to the Government. We have long-standing plans for collaboration with our NATO partners, and it is possible that they could help. However, it is not simply a question of the United Kingdom-registered fleet being available. In addition to the United Kingdom fleet of about 800 vessels, we have requisitioning powers in respect of 400 vessels registered in our overseas dependencies and 250 further vessels which are flagged out but beneficially owned by the United Kingdom. That makes a total of 1,450 vessels.

Sir David Price: Although they could be requisitioned, will my hon. Friend bear in mind that their crews are not British subjects in the ordinary sense of the word? With the changing policies of some of those countries, it is doubtful whether they would be available.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that. I had made a careful note that he and other hon. Members had referred to it as a matter that I must take back and look at more closely with my officials in the Department. I undertake to do that.

Mr. Sayeed: Beneficial ownership has been discussed a number of times. The suggestion is that those 250 ships flagged out but under our beneficial ownership could be used by us. I and many others who understand flagging out believe that that is by no means certain. We doubt whether our Government could get their hands on those ships, because it is not certain that the minority partners would necessarily let our Government get their hands on them or that their crews would want to go to war under the British flag. That being so, it is extremely optimistic to assume that 250 ships that have been flagged out will be available in time of conflict.

Mr. Mitchell: There may be some which are not available. There may be others which are in far off parts of the world and will not be immediately available. But my understanding is that in law we have the power to requisition. However, that does not detract from the perfectly valid point of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh about crewing these ships. I was about to say to him that it is one of the benefits of this overlong delayed debate that hon. Members have been able to draw attention to important matters that we must take in hand.

Mr. Garrett: In Exercise Lionheart last autumn there were huge successes, but one of the failures related to the mobility of our shipping. It was difficult to get the right types of ships for the right vehicles and with the right storage and necessary speed to get them over to mainland Europe. Can the hon. Gentleman assure the House that this matter is receiving serious consideration? In an emergency it would be of vital importance.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right, but perhaps I can reassure him about it. In order not to interfere grossly with the holiday traffic and the ferries on their daily commercial routes across the channel, they were not requisitioned. The exercise was conducted using other vessels. But obviously people would not be going abroad on holiday at times of tension.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): My hon. Friend said that the Government did not wish to disrupt holiday traffic. Will he make inquiries to discover how many British shipowners were even approached to see whether their vessels were available. I know of one vessel which was laid up and which would have been perfect for Exercise Lionheart. It could have been used, but the owners were not approached.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I shall make inquiries and write to him. However, against the fact that we required 49 vessels to support the initial Falklands operation, the fear that out of the 1,450 vessels that we have power to lay our hands on we would not be able to find that number does not seem to me to be borne out.

Should shortages emerge in the future, we could purchase ships for addition to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. There are a number of other options, some of which it would be inappropriate to dwell on here. The aim of the surveys that we have set in hand is to discover whether there will be shortages of specific types of vessel, and I have no wish to prejudge the findings. It would be for us to consider how best to meet any such shortages in specific areas, rather than to do something about the generality of our fleet on defence grounds.

A vital part of the debate related to the huge United Kingdom investment in our fleet, the importance of its overseas earnings and the jobs which it provides. A fundamental choice has to be made between whether we are for protectionism or free trade. Countries will choose whichever of those two policies suits their national needs. There may be some, with a small national fleet which they are ambitious to see grow, which feel that it makes sense to go for cargo reservation and suffer the disadvantage of higher freight rates on their exports. But if, like us, a country has a large fleet—far too large for its national trade—an open market across the world is needed in which to deploy that fleet. We are certainly in that camp, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside stressed.

Some 58 per cent. of our fleet's earnings come from the cross trades. We must have fair and open markets to provide that opportunity. Indeed, I pray in aid the words of the greatly respected president of the General Council of British Shipping who, on taking up his post, said:

> "So what should be done? Do we want Government subsidies or protectionism? No, gentlemen, we do not. I believe that is a route which we should only seek to follow if all else fails."

I concur with that view.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I have been very patient. I accept the thrust of the Minister's argument, but Norway is an even better example than the United Kingdom in cross trades. How can the hon. Gentleman justify one British vessel in the Norwegian section of the North sea and 48 Norwegian vessels in our section?

Mr. Mitchell: I shall come to that point. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised it.

The hon. Member for Wigan asked about the inspection of substandard vessels. I agree that that is important. We exercise port state control strictly and I have initiated a considerable tightening up of that. It is effective in deterring people from bringing substandard vessels to Britain.

The Department of Transport is engaged, with the help of other Government Departments, in seeking to ensure that the number of markets closed to us is kept to a minimum so that our fleet has the maximum trading opportunities. In terms of value, we reckon that only between 10 and 15 per cent. of total international seaborne trade is now subject to reservation. That is to say, between 85 and 90 per cent. is free, open and available for our ships to operate in. Certainly we keep up constant pressure in one way or another against those who seek to close the markets to us. That is most often successfully achieved by acting in co-operation with other countries. For example, talks have been going on between the United States and the Consultative Shipping Group. Those are designed to hold back the tide of protectionism where it stands today, and to ensure that there is no further creeping protectionism. That can be achieved only by acting together.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to Norway and the fact that there is only one British vessel operating there. One of the biggest single reasons for that is that Norwegian vessels are not required to take a pilot, but British vessels are. That has two disadvantages. The first is financial. To have to pay £200 on entering and leaving port in a competitive market is not peanuts. Far more important is that an oil rig requiring a supply vessel needs to have it immediately when the weather is right. If a vessel has to wait for a pilot, it will not be much cop as a potential bidder for a contract. Recognising that, at the suggestion of the GCBS I went to Norway and had long and frank discussions with its Minister. He came back here and we completed our discussions. The Norwegians have now waived that requirement in respect of United Kingdom supply vessels operating out of Norwegian ports.

Another important area is the EEC. The time has long passed when it should have developed a shipping policy. There have been enormous benefits to European countries from larger trade in goods as a result of membership. Such a policy should have applied to services in aviation and shipping, and it has not. We have been putting on as much pressure as we possibly can in recent months to try to get it to do just that. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh is right to refer to the importance of that area and of cabotage and all the unfairnesses thrown up from open access to our coastal ports for other European countries while some at least close theirs to our fleet. We cannot with equanimity allow that to continue.

The Commission, under considerable pressure from us, has at last produced its memorandum. We are waiting to see its terms, which I understand were agreed by the Commission last Wednesday. We look forward to pressing the Council of Ministers to bring that policy to a successful conclusion because it will provide fairer trading and competition within Europe.

It is not for the Government to run ships; it is for our shipowners and merchant mariners. They have had a tough task, and I praise them for the way in which they have tackled it. It is the Government's job to seek to ensure fair trading opportunities. On that I am never satisfied, but we are working on it and more progress has been made than hon. Members may recognise, particularly in relation to a joint response to protectionism by the United States and the OECD countries. I hope that in January we shall sign an agreement committing the signatories to act together against any new protectionist devices which may emerge. We attach importance to early progress on the Commission's memorandum on a shipping policy in Europe and on a competition policy as part of it.

We shall ensure that there are sufficient vessels to enable us to fulfil our defence requirements. There certainly are at present, and forecasts have been made for the years ahead. We have taken steps, such as I have spelt out to the House, to limit the burdens imposed by the Government on vessels using our ports.

I do not claim that the Government have all the answers. There is a considerable pool of wisdom in the House on this subject. It is important that Ministers should listen, and I have done so carefully. I shall consider equally carefully the points that have been made. I again express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside for having introduced the motion.

6.57 pm

Mr. Colvin: In the remaining few minutes I want to thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for his reply and also to thank those hon. Members who have participated in the debate, a feature of which has been the measure of all-party support for demands to improve the lamentable state of our Merchant Navy, and the awareness of the fact that if the present trend continues and the number of our ships continues to drop Britain will be in dire straits not only from an economic point of view, but from the point of view of our strategic defence.

I was pleased to note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was present during most of the debate. I trust that he has taken copious notes of some of the points that have been made. In particular, I was impressed by what my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) had to say about the way in which some of the bigger companies have pulled out of shipping. That highlights the essence of the problem mentioned by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State in his reply to the debate.

It is not the Government's job to run the shipping industry. It is their job to create the economic climate in which shipowners can prosper. That that climate has not been present of late is the reason for so many companies going out of shipping. I wish that it were possible to see the size of our merchant fleet maintained, but until we change the economic climate and encourage people to come back in, we are on a loser.

With that in mind, I am pleased that the GCBS, in its presentation to the Chancellor, has drawn attention to the need for allowances to be made available on secondhand ships. While we lament the state of the shipbuilding industry, there are nevertheless as many ships now laid up around the world as would constitute the whole output of our shipbuilding industry in one year.

I have no time in which to refer to the other remarks of hon. Members. The motion called on the Government to state their policies on merchant shipping, and my hon.

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Friend the Under-Secretary of State has done just that. We may not be satisfied with all his replies, but he has, nevertheless, stated the Government's policies, and I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Merchant Shipping

7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I beg to move,

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Mandatory Provisions) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Conditions for Recognition) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

Mr. Mitchell: Hon. Members will remember that in 1982 the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) Act became law. That Act enabled the Secretary of State to make certain regulations whose effect would be essentially to translate the provisions of the UN convention on a code of conduct for the liner conferences into United Kingdom law. The matter is complex, but I think that it is important that I put the situation clearly on the record. Accordingly, I hope that the House will forgive me if I go into some detail.

The purpose of the present regulations therefore is to enable the United Kingdom to accede to that convention. The convention, which came into force in October 1983, embodies a complex and wide-ranging set of rules governing the relations between shipping lines that are members of shipping conferences and between those lines and their customers, the shippers. The application of this code of conduct in the United Kingdom will be significantly modified by EC Regulation No. 954/79, commonly referred to as the Brussels package. I shall have more to say about that later. The United Kingdom intends to accede early in the new year—we hope to do so at the same time as a number of other European countries. That event will constitute a very significant development in international liner shipping and we have not taken this decision without conducting extensive consultations with interested parties. I am glad to be able to tell the House that the United Kingdom's accession to this convention is fully supported by the General Council of British Shipping and the British Shippers Council.

Although the regulations themselves are quite technical in nature—I am sure that the concern that is often expressed in the House about the state of the British shipping industry will be reflected in today's debate—hon. Members would wish me to explain the relevance of the regulations and of the code itself to the wider shipping scene.

I turn to the Government's objectives in liner shipping. The policy of successive British Governments on liner shipping has been governed by our interests both as an exporting nation and as a major shipping nation. Those two national interests continue to point in the same direction. A third of our national income is derived from international trade, and roughly that proportion of our jobs depends on its success. Most of this trade is carried by sea. Any failure to maintain competitive conditions on our shipping routes would clearly result in more expensive and less efficient sea transport, with inevitable consequences for our trade.

Equally, our shipping industry relies on its own ability to compete in maritime trades worldwide. Opinions may well differ as to the most effective method of arresting the

decline of the British flag fleet and what role the Government should play, but one issue on which there is agreement is that it is the Government's task to try to keep the world's shipping markets open to British vessels. Nearly three fifths of the freight earnings of the British shipping industry comes from trading between other countries' ports, and cross-trading earnings represent two fifths of the industry's liner earnings. Free and fair access to cargoes in other countries' ports is therefore vital to the future of the British shipping industry.

I turn to the conference system. The House will know that, in line with the practice of Governments throughout the world, we exempt liner shipping conferences from the provisions of our restrictive practices legislation. We find that liner conferences are generally beneficial in providing reliable scheduled services required by many shippers of different types of cargo. They also help to preserve stable freight rates, although this stability can be threatened when there is an abundance of competition from non-conference lines. The exemption can, of course, only be tenable provided that this competition is present to some degree, or is not prevented from developing; and provided that shippers are effectively organised so as to make their views known to the conferences. In a nutshell, closed conferences are acceptable only as part of an open system.

Thus British industry wants to have access to the regular scheduled liner shipping services provided by the conferences; and a free choice of competing non-conference carriers. British shipping wants to have the widest possible freedom to compete in the world's liner shipping routes, both within and without conferences. The Government's key shipping policy objectives are to ensure that these very reasonable desires of British industry and British shipping can be fulfilled.

But the House will not be surprised to know that a number of developing countries do not share the Government's desire to maintain an open market in liner shipping. They want instead to share cargoes as exclusively as possible between trading partners. It was these pressures for cargo reservation which were a moving force in establishing the UN liner code.

The core of the code is concerned with: first, the relations among conference shipping lines: and, secondly, the relations between conferences and shippers. In dealing with the relations between conferences and shippers, the code states that its objective is to

"balance the interests of the suppliers and users of liner shipping services".

The provisions of the code in large measure reflect the practices that have developed internationally in recent years and are, I believe, broadly acceptable to shippers and shipowners alike.

But in dealing with the relationship between conference lines the UN code sought to impose the very kind of rigid cargo-sharing that the Government have so often fought to resist. Article 2 provided that cargo should be divided equally between conference lines of the two countries that were served, leaving other conference lines to carry some 20 per cent. between them. This so-called 40:40:20 division of conference cargoes was unacceptable to the Government and was the main reason why the United Kingdom voted against the code convention at the diplomatic conference which adopted it in 1974.

Hon. Members who specialise in this subject will know that some OECD countries including France, West Germany and Belgium had voted in favour of the code and other OECD countries had merely abstained. We therefore faced the unhappy prospect that the United Kingdom might be compelled to stand aloof while this new regime was applied without restraint on many of the world's major shipping routes. In that event British shipping lines' cross-trading opportunities would have been severely restricted. I know that hon. Members would be deeply concerned at such a prospect.

Clearly there were, therefore, compelling reasons for OECD countries to adopt a more uniform approach to the code for EC states and, in particular, to agree a common position. That common policy was developed under the last Labour Administration; and the present Government were glad to continue it on behalf of the United Kingdom very soon after we came into office in 1979. The policy is embodied in the Brussels package, which creates directly applicable law in the United Kingdom.

The overall effect of the Community's policy on the code will be that its cargo-sharing provisions will protect the shipping of only those countries, mainly developing countries, that wish them to do so. This is assured by three key provisions. First, when the code applies to a route between a Community member state and a third country, conference lines from all member states will compete on that route on the same footing. Secondly, lines from countries within the OECD which intend to accede to the code will also be able to compete on the same footing provided that they offer reciprocal treatment on routes serving their own countries. Finland, Norway and Sweden have already announced their intention of joining the code and operating it in the same amended way as the United Kingdom and the rest of the EC. Thirdly, the conference shipping lines of other OECD countries such as Australia and the United States of America, which at present do not intend to accede to the code, will also be treated in the Community on the same footing as Community conference lines, so long as those countries do not themselves discriminate against Community shipping. Japan is the only country in the OECD which has indicated an intention of acceding to the UN code without having made clear what kind of reciprocal arrangements will be available, and discussions between the Community and Japan are continuing.

As a result of these fundamental modifications the Department has calculated that the code's cargo-sharing provisions will in practice reserve only cargoes representing between 10 per cent. and 15 per cent. of the world's liner conference trade; the remainder will be free of cargo reservation. I know that the House will welcome that in the light of earlier discussions on dealing with protectionism and access for our ship operators.

As I have mentioned, the code's basic regime concerning the relations between conferences and shippers was altogether more acceptable. The Brussels package contains some modifications to certain of the code's provisions but in the main the provisions which give rights to shippers to be consulted on the basis of full information are welcome.

There are two draft statutory instruments. The first, the mandatory provisions regulations, identifies the code's provisions which are to give rise to rights and duties. The second defines a United Kingdom national shipping line for the purposes of the code and defines those shippers' organisations which will have rights to be consulted.

The Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Mandatory Provisions) Regulations 1984 implement the

[Mr. Mitchell]

code convention. The code's provisions are a mixture of mandatory and recommendatory provisions, and some of the mandatory provisions are ambiguous. It would not therefore have been possible or desirable to import the code as a whole into our law.

Regulation 2 lays down that these regulations apply to conferences which have their seat in the United Kingdom or serve the trade of the United Kingdom.

Regulation 3 lies at the heart of the statutory instrument and sets out in the form of a table those provisions of the code which are to be mandatory. The table identifies those people by whom and against whom these provisions may be enforced.

I do not believe that this table contains any unexpected or unusual decisions. We have sought to reproduce the code's mandatory provisions as faithfully as possible. Some minor clarifications have been made to ensure that the provisions work effectively and, above all, do not inhibit competition. I shall draw the attention of the House to just two.

First, regulation 2.4 *(b)* is clarified by stating that the share of cargo available to cross-trading lines is a right to acquire a share by commercial means. We wish to avoid any possibility of a cross-trading line seeking to increase its share simply through legal action.

Secondly, regulation 13.1 (2) is clarified to make it plain that conference lines are entitled to charge rates less than the published tariff. Our objective is again to ensure that this provision does not dampen competition.

Regulation 4 ensures that where any conference is incorporated its individual member lines remain responsible in respect of the duties set out in regulation 3, so far as this lies within their power. Regulation 5 contains minor clarifications to chapter VI of the code which deals with

"Provisions and Machinery for the Settlement of Disputes".

The Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Conditions for Recognition) Regulations 1984 set the conditions for a national shipping line and shippers' organisation.

The code defines a national shipping line, but allows Governments to add further criteria. The code conferred certain privileges on national shipping lines and although these have largely been removed by the Brussels package it is widely acknowledged that national line status will be of some importance. During our consultations with shipowners, shippers and the seafaring unions some suggestions were made which in the Government's view would have imposed unduly restrictive conditions on national shipping lines. Some groups felt that United Kingdom national shipping lines should be British-owned, other groups felt that United Kingdom national shipping lines should be compelled to fly the British flag.

The Government have decided to set criteria to maintain as open a market system as possible for shipping lines operating out of the United Kingdom. Regulation 2 therefore limits national shipping line status only in the following way. Lines will be regarded as national shipping lines only in respect of those conferences of which they are members. And they will have to be of British nationality —which is defined as having their principal place of business in the United Kingdom. The only other limitation is that lines from countries which would refuse similar treatment for British lines will themselves be excluded. I believe that that is agreeable to the House.

The code also allows Governments to decide who should have the right to take part in consultations with the conferences. Here, our objective has been to ensure that those organisations which already have a key role in representing shippers' interests will have the right to be consulted under the code. We have also been concerned to avoid a position where conferences are obliged to consult so many organisations that the process becomes unmanageable.

There are two avenues available to the Government to determine who should have those consultation rights. The first—and the fundamental one—is to set down the conditions for recognition as a shippers' organisation. The code contains a basic definition of a shippers' organisation and allows Governments to add further conditions. These conditions, set out in regulation 3, are necessarily expressed in broad terms. All those whom we have consulted have argued against a very rigid set of conditions. I hope that the House will agree that we are right to respond to consultation in that way.

Regulation 3 allows one national organisation, which is expected usually to be the British Shippers Council, to claim consultation rights in respect of most if not all conferences subject to the code. In addition, other shippers' organisations may claim consultation rights where they can show that they represent shippers of such quantities of goods with that conference that it is reasonable for them to be consulted. If the conference sought to deny that claim it would be for the conference to show either that the shippers concerned were already adequately represented by recognised shippers' organisations or that there were so many other organisations representing more cargo that recognition would be inappropriate.

We look to both shipowners and shippers to operate the consultation procedure in a constructive fashion. With goodwill on both sides I am sure that the shippers' interests can be effectively and efficiently represented.

The second avenue by which consultation rights may be established is designed to benefit large individual shippers and representatives of shippers. Regulation 5 gives the Secretary of State the power to designate these groups.

As the conditions that we have imposed on shippers' organisations represent something of a compromise between competing claims, I think that it would be right at this stage to state that the Secretary of State would use his powers of designation only in exceptional circumstances. He would adopt criteria in line with those laid down for shippers' organisations. The result would be that when large shippers, or a large number of small shippers, using the same agent, such as a freight forwarder, feel that their interests have not been adequately represented to a particular conference they will be able to seek consultation rights. I think that that is a comprehensive set of guidelines. I am sure that the House will agree.

I would now like to say something about non-conference lines and the code. The diplomatic conference that adopted the code convention also adopted a resolution on non-conference shipping lines which stated that such lines should not be prevented from operating provided that

they competed fairly. But that resolution is not legally binding and the code itself confers no rights on non-conference shipping.

The problem that we face is that there is an increasing disposition among some developing countries to seek to close their shipping trades to non-conference lines and thus establish a monopoly for the conferences. That position would be unacceptable to the British Government on routes serving the United Kingdom.

We have therefore concluded that the United Kingdom's accession will be subject to the condition that the United Kingdom will be bound by the convention only while our trading partners permit non-conference lines to compete in our mutual trades. We shall make a formal reservation along these lines when we come to accede. In the event that non-conference lines were to be excluded by another contracting party the Government would be able to suspend the operation of the code using section 4 of the enabling Act and would thus be free to use the wide-ranging retaliatory powers contained in section 14 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1974. We have discussed our intention with our Community partners and we understand that other OECD Governments are likely to make similar reservations when they accede.

Finally, let me just touch on other current initiatives in liner shipping with which the Government are closely involved. I have explained that the Brussels package ensures that the OECD's ground rules concerning competition in the provision of liner shipping services are fully respected. But there is clearly a need for the OECD countries to continue to develop unambiguous and positive policies to promote their interests in liner shipping, particularly as more countries come to accede to the code.

I have referred already to the EEC regulations and the United States—Consultative Shipping Group dialogue, so I shall not refer to that again. I have sought to set out the Government's objectives in pursuing the interests of British shipping and its customers. The code, together with the Brussels package, is an attempt—some would say a very ambitious attempt — to reconcile quite different and potentially conflicting aims. But the alternative would have been a series of unilateral or, perhaps, regional initiatives taken by each sovereign state attempting to impose its preferred solutions on the shipping lines of its trading partners. Interference of that sort would have led to inefficiency, increased costs for shipping lines and, not least, the threat of very real disruption to shipping and trading operations where disputes could not be resolved.

The British Government recognise that the code represents something of a challenge and we have equipped ourselves with appropriate defensive powers if things go wrong. We shall do our best to make the code work effectively because we believe it holds out the best prospects for the stable development of liner shipping and that, of the options available, it represents the best course for British shipping and for British industry at large.

I have spoken at some length. It is a complex matter and it is right to put on record exactly what is involved in this important step for our shipping interests. I commend the regulations to the House.

7.22 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): During the excellent preceding debate hon. Members from both sides of the House made it absolutely clear to the Government that action to arrest the critical decline of our merchant fleet is required immediately. We must judge these regulations, tortuous though they may be, in the light of that criterion.

On the matter of the Brussels package, we have reached the stage when we must question whether it is in the best interests of the United Kingdom to continue to support it. Continued support makes sense only when the United Kingdom's earnings through cross trade exceeds the earnings that could be made from carrying 40 per cent. of our liner imports and exports. Clearly, that position has not yet been reached. However, the changes between 1979 and 1982 show the way in which matters are moving. Great change is taking place. The position is not quite what the Minister alleged. Serious changes are occuring and we must consider whether the package is acceptable to us.

The second set of regulations deal with the national shipping lines. They do not provide adequate defence for the United Kingdom shipping interests, and that applies especially to the definition of a national shipping line. Neither ownership nor the registration of vessels is taken into account to the extent that national line status can be accorded even if ownership and registration are outside the United Kingdom.

While regulation 2(3)—the conditions for recognition —has been included because of EEC regulation 954/79, the Government have not reconsidered that regulation in the light of the changed circumstances of United Kingdom shipping. The decline in the United Kingdom's liner trade calls for the regulation to be amended so that national line status is accorded only to companies with ownership and registration within the United Kingdom. However, recognising the existence of the EEC regulation, national line status could be accorded only to companies using vessels registered in the United Kingdom or in other member states.

Regulations 2(1), (2) and (3) give national line status to existing members of liner conferences. Even if they use non-United Kingdom flag ships with non-United Kingdom crews, such status can be retained by the conference members. For example, a Swiss-owned Liberian flag of convenience ship with a Singaporean or Filipino crew could still be used by a company with national line status. That really makes nonsense of the definition of a national shipping line.

The requirement that reciprocal arrangements exist for a foreign-owned company to receive national line status in the United Kingdom provides some attempt to protect our interests, but it is the very narrow interest of owners, because United Kingdom companies establishing subsidiaries abroad would be using foreign ships and labour, with no benefit to United Kingdom seafarers or to the nation as a whole.

The regulations are clearly aimed at the Comecon countries, because they are regarded as operating unfairly, and I subscribe to that view, but there is no attempt to act against flag-of-convenience operations, which are just as unfair and are a greater threat to British shipping. Overall, the regulations will not help to protect United Kingdom shipping. They will not secure existing operations or promote further opportunities.

I shall not ask my hon. Friends—if they are still around—to divide the House. I merely wish to point out to the Minister that some of us are greatly upset by the regulations. We do not believe that they will in any way deal with the very grave position facing British shipping.

[Mr. Roger Stott]

The Government are in the process of undertaking a review of shipping. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces is studying the whole question, but it is limited to the defence requirements for merchant shipping and the capability of the fleet to meet those requirements. The Under-Secretary of State, in answer to a question on 10 December, at column 304 of the *Official Report*, said that the review would take into account only vessels and not manpower, nor the economic necessities of maintaining a merchant fleet. I hope that the Minister will take that point on board.

I wish to crave your indulgence for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I may stray slightly outside the motion. However, I believe that an important matter should be put on the record. The Minister must ensure that the consultants whom he has engaged to consider the matter also consider manpower. He will know from the questions asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir. D. Price) that manpower is important, especially if there is another Falklands-type conflict, where ships that are flagged out may be brought back into Britain, but their crews may not.

In the light of the disastrous state of British shipping and the dire prospects for United Kingdom companies, the Government should undertake a major review of the industry. It is 14 years since Lord Rochdale made his major report on shipping, and a great deal has changed since then. In fact, the Government's lack of concern and their inactivity have condoned the worst decline in our merchant fleet in our history. It is time that we did something about that.

I shall not rehearse the arguments that I used in the previous debate. I am sure that the Minister is well aware of the feeling of hon. Members on both sides of the House about this great industry. I am sure that he is also well aware that something must be done quickly to arrest that decline. I do not believe that the regulations will go any way towards that. Much more positive action is required.

7.30 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): First, I must declare an interest as I am associated with an organisation which is a member of the British Federation of Commodity Associations.

Regulation 2 is headed:

"National Shipping Lines of the United Kingdom".

I recognise the necessity for the regulation where there is a definition of a national shipping line. The United Nations liner code enables developing countries to participate in liner conference trade by virtue of having the right to carry in vessels of their national lines about 40 per cent. of the goods generated by trade between them. The countries at the other end would also have about 40 per cent. The remaining 20 per cent. of trade can be acquired by vessels of third countries. That is the so-called 40:40:20 rule.

If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has read the Second Reading debate on the 1982 Bill, as it then was, he will understand that I have always been opposed to the United Nations liner code, which led to the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) Act 1982. I have opposed it because of its impression and the opportunity which it has afforded to less scrupulous countries to abuse normal commercial practices and to take refuge for their action behind the code. I spoke at length on these matters when the 1982 Bill was being considered in Committee.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State talk about the appropriate defensive powers that the Government have taken if things go wrong. I cannot help feeling that I have been reinforced in the view that I took in 1982, that the whole of this bureaucratic and cumbersome apparatus is very much the best of a bad job. My hon. Friend spoke about the problems that would have ensued if we had not decided to adhere to the code. He reminded the House of the difficulties that might have arisen if countries had pursued their separate interests. None the less, I am filled with gloom as I hear once again a description of the way in which the proposed apparatus will work.

I remind the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) of what was said in the House on 9 June 1978 by the then hon. Member for Hackney, Central, Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis:

"But much of the current support for the United Nations code derives from the desire of certain developed countries to increase their share of liner trades by cargo reservation, since it appears that they cannot win a greater share by commercial means. I see no reason why we should encourage any move at all in this direction."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1978; Vol. 951, c. 610.]

I am glad that after a considerable period my hon. Friend has tabled the regulations, which seek to define important matters. In regulation 2(2) we have a clear definition of a shipping line of British nationality. In regulation 2(3) recognition of a shipping line as being of British nationality is accorded to shipping lines of member states of the EEC. I understand that that provision will operate reciprocally within the Community. However, in regulations 2(4) and 2(5) recognition as a national shipping line of the United Kingdom is accorded to lines of states outside the EEC under certain conditions. In regulation 2(4) there is a requirement for an effective opportunity to ply for trade, and in regulation 2(5) there are requirements relating to the percentage of share capital and directors. Those conditions may be subject to change—possibly to sudden change. For example, the opportunity to ply for trade could be restricted. The percentage of shareholders could change, and so could the number of directors. I should like to know what steps my hon. Friend proposes to take to ensure that when a decision has been made on such conditions there will be a system of monitoring to ensure that the conditions on which the decision was taken are retained.

I have always been worried that the code is vague and imprecise. I understand the problem of drafting regulations that result from a code that has been internationally criticised for being vague and imprecise. However, Britain decided to adopt the code, and it has taken seriously the subsequent legislation. It has attempted to make as good a job of it as possible. I ask my hon. Friend to set before the House the evidence he has that the issue is being taken equally seriously by other code states and that they are taking the necessary steps to draft legislation, especially the developing countries which have adopted the code. Unless all signatories to the code apply equally strict conditions, there is a danger that the code will not work.

Regulation 3 is headed "Shippers' Organisations". In regulation 3(2)*(b)* there is the right for shippers' organisations to be consulted by the conference under certain conditions. The conference is given the opportunity of saying under regulation 3(2)*(b)*(ii)

"that it would not be appropriate to consult".

In the debates that took place prior to the 1982 Act, I strongly represented the views of shippers of raw materials which were members of the British Federation of Commodity Associations. The commodities that are traded through London rarely reach the shores of the United Kingdom. The majority of them pass between third countries. However, the commission earned by London trading houses on such transactions is an important part of our invisible earnings. The commodity trades, according to the latest statistics that are available, earned £350 million in invisibles in 1983. The trade associations of London, which cover commodities such as sugar, cocoa, non-ferrous metals and rubber, may have problems from time to time with the carriage of their commodities by liner conference which they will need to discuss with the conferences. It is astonishing that the regulations should contain a proviso that might enable any conference to refuse such consultation on the ground that the quantities carried were not large enough or that the trade concerned belonged to a larger shippers' organisation, such as the British Shippers Council.

When there are real problems it is essential that the trade should be able to consult directly with the conference. It should not have to consult any other organisation, unless it wishes to do so. Representations have been made to my hon. Friend the Minister on this issue and I hope that he will be able to give some assurance when he replies that it is not his intention to deprive any trade of the opportunity of full consultation when a genuine problem arises.

This is the first piece of Government legislation that I have opposed at all stages with both voice and vote. When historians come to plot the decline of the British merchant marine, I hope that one of them will read the proceedings in Standing Committee during April 1982 and possibly the report of this debate. I hope that it will be noted that at least one Member of this place expressed serious reservations and surprise that the British Government found it necessary to accede to the proposal.

7.38 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I take up the rather sombre tone of the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), who has argued in the same vein for a number of years. Like many who spoke in the previous debate on merchant shipping, I have no direct financial interest. However, I represent a constituency that contains one of the four designated nautical colleges. As we heard from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) in the previous debate, the colleges are under threat of closure. As the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) said in the previous debate, my constituency is a town which lost more merchant seamen in the past two wars than any other. My constituency contains the largest branch of the National Union of Seamen in the north of England and the general secretary of the NUS comes from my constituency. My constituency is based on Tyne Dock. As I have said, I have no financial interest but I have a great interest in the maritime industry.

It is with great sadness that I take part in this debate, especially in view of the earlier speech on the motion and the introduction to these regulations by the Under-Secretary of State. There is great resentment in my constituency about the way in which the Government have let down the Merchant Navy. These regulations are not a step forward. The Under-Secretary of State took 35 minutes to wind up in a three-hour debate, thereby preventing me from making a speech, and that can only add to the resentment.

Mr. David Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman spoke for 35 minutes in the previous debate and gave a long introduction to this debate. He will have a chance to make his point when winding up.

The Under-Secretary of State talked about the Brussels package. I hope that all hon. Members wish the new commissioner in charge of transport, Stanley Clinton Davis, well in his task. I deplore the scurrilous attacks made on him and his colleague, Lord Cockfield, by the leader of the Liberal party when in Brussels. It was disgraceful to make such attacks on two first-class men. We wish Stanley Clinton Davis well in his efforts to grapple with the problem connected with the Brussels package.

The Under-Secretary of State said that our maritime ability will depend upon our industry's 'ability. As we argued for three hours in the previous debate, this has nothing to do with the industry's ability—it has to do with the fiscal measures that the Government are prepared to take to help the maritime industry to survive. I am sad that the Under-Secretary of State was not able to pick up that point, which was made ferociously by both sides of the House. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that message back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and say how unfair the Government's decisions in the last Budget were in reducing the overseas earnings allowance of seamen. That measure will increase the cost of the wages of the British shipping industry. It will give the lie to the point made by the Under-Secretary of State that our maritime ability depends upon the industry's ability. The Government have shown no incentive in trying to help the merchant shipping industry.

About 22 minutes ago, the Under-Secretary of State assured us that the purpose of the regulations and his policy was to protect British shipping. That is not how the shipping industry sees it. The hon. Gentleman responded by referring to the supply ships in the Norwegian section of the North sea. Some months ago, the hon. Gentleman met the responsible Minister, but we are still awaiting developments. The Norwegians operate a bureaucratic system that makes it virtually impossible for British offshore and supply vessels to become involved. It is as simple as that. The Norwegians know that, and they are pulling the wool over the Minister's eyes.

In introducing the regulations, the Under-Secretary of State rightly mentioned many other OECD countries, specifically Norway, Sweden and Denmark. I understand that the British Government are conducting negotiations with the Soviet Government. The British Government propose to preclude any Russian vessels from entering the port of Tyne and the river Tyne. I urge the Under-Secretary of State — he probably does not have the necessary information with him — to look into this matter. We can understand why the Government do not want to let the Russians into Barrow-in-Furness and Rosyth. I seriously warn the Government that, if they prevent Russian vessels from entering the river Tyne, they will add to unemployment. As a representative of the travel-to-work area with the highest unemployment rate in

[Dr. Clark]

England — more than 30 per cent. of the men in the travel-to-work area of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) are out of work —I know that already this year we have had more than £1 million worth of work from the Russians. I have heard much criticism of the Russians in this debate, but at least they pay their bill and are good customers. We want Russian vessels on the river Tyne. I hope that, if the Under-Secretary of State cannot give an answer today, he will write to me.

7.45 pm

Mr. David Mitchell: I do not want to detain the House for any longer than need be. I apologise to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) if my summing up in the earlier debate deprived him of the opportunity to participate. That was unintentional. We did not have sufficient time to discuss such an important subject. I wanted to put several points on the record, because hon. Members on both sides of the House raised a large number of issues. I shall ensure that the points made by the hon. Member for South Shields about fiscal matters are conveyed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I shall write to him about the entry into the Tyne of Russian vessels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) raised a number of points and expressed his continuing anxieties. I well know the points that he made at the earlier stage of the legislation. I shall write to my hon. Friend about the legislation in other countries. The Government's objective in the definition of a shipper's organisation has been to ensure that those organisations able to play a worthwhile role in consulting conferences will be recognised, but to avoid setting conditions requiring conferences to consult so many organisations that the process becomes unmanageable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge asked about a national line and about how the Government will monitor conditions set out in regulations 2(4) and 2(5). The Government will not intervene. These are matters for the liner conference and disputes will be referred to the civil courts. It will be in the interests of other lines to monitor progress.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and other hon. Members questioned the wisdom of our being involved. They suggested that extrapolating the historic trend of protectionism raised the question whether we would be better to join those countries which voted in favour of the code and get our 40 per cent. out of our trade. That assumes that no further effective steps are taken to resist protectionism. I hope that I managed to convey to the House our clear intention to be active on that front, especially in co-ordinating resistance protectionism within Europe and through the United States — Consultative Shipping Group talks, with the expectation that there will be progress in January or February.

Hon. Members referred to charges imposed on our exporters if they lose the freedom to choose which they now enjoy. Some goods for Brazil from the east coast of the United States travel via western Europe because that is cheaper than using the carved up trade between the other two countries. That shows the damaging effect on a country's exports when there is a stranglehold on the shipment of goods.

The industry's calculations show, and the General Council of British Shipping has made this point also, that it would be better for our ship operators if we joined the liner code on the terms now proposed. Although I understand the misgivings that have been expressed, I believe that there must be a coincidence of interest between the ship owners and the unions. There is room for the unions to talk more closely and to understand each other's thinking. That would be a helpful step forward. I hope that hon. Members will join me in saying that that should be commended to the parties. I hope, too, that the House will feel it right to approve these regulations.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Mandatory Provisions) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

MERCHANT SHIPPING

Resolved,

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) (Conditions for Recognition) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 13th November, be approved. — *[Mr. David Mitchell.]*

Northern Ireland (Appropriation)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Before I call the Minister to move the Appropriation (No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, I should remind the House that this order deals with specific Supplementary Estimates and the debate should, therefore, be confined to agricultural assistance and social security benefits, or to other specified matters arising directly from the order.

7.50 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

This order is being made under paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The purpose of the draft order is to authorise the issue of £41 million out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland in respect of the autumn Supplementary Estimates of Northern Ireland departments and to appropriate this sum for the purposes shown in the schedule. The House has already approved a total Estimate provision of £2,832 million for this financial year; the present draft order will bring the figure to £2,873 million. Detailed information about the provision sought can be found in the autumn Supplementary Estimates volume, copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office. The draft order covers only four out of the 39 Votes of Northern Ireland Departments. Provision is sought to meet the cost of the continuation of special measures to assist agriculture, and to fund the milk outgoers scheme. On the social security side, more money is required to pay increased numbers of recipients of a range of non-contributory benefits and to cover the cost of the new severe disablement allowance.

Before I deal with the details of the provisions I shall, as is customary on these occasions, and with your permission Mr. Deputy Speaker, say a few words about the economic position in Northern Ireland. Mr. Deputy Speaker has not yet intervened. I have read the previous Appropriation debates as part of my training for this post, which is why I asked for the permission of Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister should set a good example by following the advice that I tendered at the outset, when I reminded the House that the debate should be confined to agricultural assistance, social security benefits or other specified matters arising directly from the order. I am sure that the Minister does not want to debate the economy of Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: I shall accept your guidance on that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall have to use my rather splendid paragraph on some other occasion, when I know that it will be enjoyed by hon. Members.

Now to the details of the four Votes covered by these Supplementary Estimates. The main purpose of the two Votes in Class I, which covers agriculture, is to increase funds for the various special aid measures to assist agriculture which were announced in February 1984. Provision is also sought to cover the initial payments under the milk outgoers scheme and the fees and expenses of tribunal and panel members adjudicating milk quota cases.

In Vote 1 there are three main items. An estimated £450,000 is sought for continued measures to develop the quality of beef cattle production, mainly through reduced charges under the Department's artificial insemination service. That provision is part of the special aid measures, most of which fall in Vote 2, and to which I shall be referring a little later in this speech.

New provision of £800,000 is required to meet the cost of compensation payments to those milk producers who have undertaken to give up milk production and thereby release quota for reallocation. A further £370,000 is sought to cover the costs of the Northern Ireland dairy produce quota tribunal and local panels established to adjudicate on special case claims and quota allocations, together with payments to the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board for the administration of certain functions under the dairy produce quota regulations.

Right hon. and hon. Members would, I am sure, wish me to make some comment on the present milk quotas position. All wholesale producers have by now received definitive primary quota allocations based on 1983 sales. The total primary wholesale quota so issued amounts to some 1,286 million litres, out of the total Northern Ireland allocation of 1,316·7 million litres, which means that 30·7 million litres have not been allocated. About 3,900 producers applied for special case treatment, either because of an exceptional event which adversely affected production in 1983 or because they were committed to expansion. Almost all these special case claims have been considered and provisional awards of secondary wholesale quota have been made by local panels in about 1,700 cases. The remaining claims have been rejected. Producers have, of course, the right of appeal to the Northern Ireland Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal, and at present 750 have exercised that right. The tribunal is also required to adjudicate on cases made under the exceptional hardship rules and here 3,430 producers applied for consideration. As at 28 November, decisions had been taken on 1,788 of these and provisional awards made in 540 cases. The remainder will be dealt with over the course of the next few weeks.

I have great sympathy for those farmers who are attempting to make unwelcome and difficult adjustments in circumstances where unavoidable delays have resulted in uncertainty about final quota allocations and levy liability. It would be remiss of me to continue without reference to the immense efforts being made by members of the tribunal and panels on behalf of those farmers who have sought a change in their position under the special case rules or have made appeals. In particular I should mention the leadership, which has been provided by Mr. W. E. Boyd, the chairman of the tribunal. The industry and the Government have cause to be grateful to Mr. Boyd and the many other people involved in establishing a base from which individual producers can better take sensible decisions about their milk businesses.

Under the milk outgoers scheme 595 producers have submitted applications, thereby offering to release a total of 53·3 million litres for reallocation. The Department has written to all producers with a valid application inviting them to proceed, and those who decide to take up this invitation will have four weeks to make a claim for payment. Since producers with special case or hardship applications do not have to commit themselves until their claims are determined, it will therefore be some time before the position on overall quota surrender is known. However, as a number of applicants have decided to

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withdraw from the scheme it is already clear that additional quota released will be well below the initial offer levels.

With only 30·7 million litres of primary wholesale quota unallocated out of the Northern Ireland total, and a potential maximum of about a further 20 million litres becoming available from the outgoers scheme, the way ahead for distribution to people with special claims will obviously be difficult.

The second of the two agriculture votes, Class I, Vote 2, is mainly for special local support schemes. There is £5·5 million required for continuation of the milk consumer subsidy, which enables a higher wholesale price to be fixed for milk going to the liquid consumption market. Without that, consumers in Northern Ireland would have to pay more than consumers in Great Britain, or dairy farmers in Northern Ireland would suffer an even bigger gap between their average milk price and that in Great Britain. There is £2·3 million required for continuation of aid to pig and poultrymeat processing plants and egg packing stations, with the objective of easing the pressures on the intensive livestock sector and maintaining employment in the processing industry. Finally, £1,948,000 is sought under the grassland scheme, which was first introduced two years ago to encourage the improvement of grassland productivity outside the less-favoured areas. Following extension of the less-favoured areas the scheme will, of course, now apply to a much reduced area and expenditure will consequently be less.

I close my remarks in relation to agriculture by reminding the House of the background to special aids and the objectives we are seeking to achieve by continuing to support them. The absolute and relative importance of agriculture to the Northern Ireland economy is obvious. This is one of the first points that struck me when looking at the structure of the economy of the Province. Agriculture remains the largest industry — farm employment represents 9·8 per cent. of total civil employment and ancillary industries constitute a further 3 per cent. Agriculture produces 5·6 per cent. of the Northern Ireland gross domestic product. At the same time, farmers in Northern Ireland face particular disadvantages, such as remoteness from the main markets, high dependence on imported feedstuffs and lack of suitable alternatives to livestock enterprises, the latter being less well supported under the common agricultural policy than other products such as cereals.

Against the background of a general economic weakness, and unemployment rates higher than those in any other United Kingdom region, the justification for those special aids is that they will be of some assistance in maintaining production and employment on and off farms. Having visited farms in Northern Ireland, I know why farmers have concentrated on livestock as opposed to cereal growing, and I now realise how high up they are and the amount of rain that falls in those areas.

With regard to the social security programme, additional provision is being sought in Votes 1 and 2 of Class X. Vote 1, which covers national insurance, makes provision for the supplement from the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland to the Northern Ireland national insurance fund. The supplement is an annually defined percentage of contribution income, which for the current year is set at 11 per cent. The Estimates may therefore need revision during or after each financial year in the light of the Government Actuary's revised forecasts of contribution income. The supplementary provision now sought thus comprises an upward revision of £3·9 million for the current year, and a final upward adjustment of £250,000 in respect of 1979-80.

Class X, Vote 2, covers non-contributory benefits. The Supplementary Estimate of £26·12 million represents an increase of 6·3 per cent. on the original provision. The largest increase sought is for supplementary benefits. The additional provision of £770,000 in respect of supplementary pensions is necessary because of the reduction from 70 to 65 years of age in the upper qualifying age for age-related heating additions and the introduction of a new, higher age-related rate. The additional provision of £14·22 million sought for supplementary allowances is attributable to a rise in the number of beneficiaries and an increasing number of single payments.

An additional £7·8 million is sought in respect of housing benefits. There have been increases both in the numbers of eligible claimants and in the average weekly rebates and allowances.

A new benefit — severe disablement allowance — replaced non-contributory invalidity pensions from 29 November 1984. The new allowance is similar in purpose to the benefit that it has replaced, but more people will receive it. All those who qualified for receipt of non-contributory invalidity pensions on 29 November automatically qualified for the new allowance. Apart from that, people who have been continuously incapable of work for at least 28 weeks because of a disability on or before their 20th birthday can qualify for the new benefit simply on that basis. Those who become incapable of work later in life must also be severely disabled to qualify. Married women can claim the severe disablement allowance even if they are able to carry out normal household duties. The benefit is being introduced in two phases—people aged 50 or over and those aged 16 to 34 can get the new allowance from November 1984, while those aged 35 to 49 will be eligible from November 1985.

There are several other factors contributing to the net increase sought in that Vote. In particular, there is an additional provision of £800,000 in respect of attendance allowances due primarily to a rise in the number of beneficiaries.

In my opening remarks I have tried to outline briefly the main features of the draft order and to give right hon. and hon. Members an appreciation of the reasons for the changes in these four Northern Ireland Votes. I shall listen with interest to the points raised by hon. Members, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will reply.

8.4 pm

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): I intervene briefly to give my agricultural friends the opportunity to shake the straw out of their hair because no doubt they will be splashing about in the milk quota once again when they have had time to digest what the Minister has just told us. I should like to comment on three of the allowances that he mentioned when he introduced the Supplementary Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services in Class X, Vote 2.

I should like to comment, first, on the attendance allowance increase of £800,000. That must be the best £800,000 that we shall spend this year. I am glad that there are 500 new beneficiaries. There are not all that many of

them in Upper Bann, but I am glad that some people are having success in getting that allowance. It is one of the most frustrating allowances to deal with and upon which to advise one's constituents.

I should like to refer to the method that is used to determine whether someone qualifies for the allowance. A doctor visits the applicant, who might be an old person, with his memory failing. Not all applicants, but many, might suffer from varying degrees of dementia. The doctor asks the applicant a series of questions, as well as giving him a medical examination. Such people are not in the section of the community that tries to suck the system dry. The applicant tries honestly to answer the questions asked by the doctor. He might be more than honest, and understate his case, thus depriving himself of the allowance. In doing so, such people are only doing themselves and the community in general a disservice. The assessor might take at face value what the person says, so he is doing us all a disservice.

Surely, if anything, the allowance was designed to ensure that we do not put a greater burden on geriatric hospitals and other homes which are the alternative for elderly people if their families cannot maintain them at home. Some 500 people will put an added burden of almost £1 million on our social security budget, yet the one thing of which we can be sure is that there will be no gross abuse of the increase. The only abuse, if there is one, is that the elderly person might marginally receive some assistance to which he is not entitled if one applies a strict interpretation to the rules. But, in reality, £1 million is being spread among several concerned families in the community in an attempt to help them to look after the elderly people in the bosom of the family and prevent them from becoming an added burden on our society.

I hope that an effort will be made to involve the applicant's local doctor, because the applicant's general practitioner is frequently at variance with the assessing doctor. If local doctors are professionals and we are to believe that they will make an honest judgment—which we must believe—some cognisance must be taken of their assessment of whether that person, and his family, should benefit from the allowance. Therefore, I welcome the increase and look forward to its increasing even more. I believe that it will be offset by savings in other places.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the most frustrating thing in connection with attendance allowance is that, if someone has an independent mind and does not want to feel embarrassed by letting the person visiting him know how incapable he is, there is no appeal system, except on a point of law?

Mr. McCusker: I have suffered the same frustration as the hon. Gentleman and others. We are dealing with a category of people who do not want to take advantage of the system. Perhaps one can say that that is unfortunate. That applies to other aspects of the social security system. Those are the people who are least willing to take what they are entitled to—for example, in supplementary benefit—whereas others are prepared to take what they are not entitled to.

Heating addition is another part of the supplementary benefits system. A few days ago I had a visit from an elderly constituent who had moved home. In her former home she had used a room heater from which she ran several radiators. She had been assessed as qualifying for the higher rate of heating allowance. In her new home she used a similar room heater but without radiators. She still had to fire that room heater, but she also bought a couple of oil-filled radiators to heat the other rooms. That combination was more expensive to run, yet she was told, "I am sorry, but you no longer qualify for the higher heating addition. You will now qualify for the lower heating addition." That is incredible.

I choose that allowance as an example, and I should like to make it clear, first, that we are dealing with the same category of person to which I referred earlier, and, secondly, if there is any abuse, it is marginal. We are talking about someone aged 60 or 70 who is taking advantage of the social security system to get perhaps £1 or £2 more than he ought simply to heat his home. That is an extremely fine judgment to make.

Most of the money is spent on supplementary benefit. Is the Minister satisfied that every effort has been made to prevent massive abuse of that system? Is he convinced that the number of investigators at his disposal is adequate to do the job? Equally, is he convinced that in his Department and social security offices generally there is an even-handed application when judging these cases?

The Minister of State talked about an increase in the number of claims for single payments. I have been supplied with some statistics, which show that 33,000 single payments were made in 1979. By 1983, the figure was in excess of 100,000. In 1979, single payments amounted to about £1·5 million, but by 1983 they were in excess of £12 million. Is the Minister satisfied that we are getting value for money?

In essence we are not talking about people aged 65 or 70 who have given a lifetime's service to the community and have applied for assistance to help buy a new appliance. In fact, the lady who came to me with her heating problem bought a new cooker for £90. She is in receipt of minimal supplementary benefit, and I suggested that she should apply for supplementary benefit assistance to help buy that appliance. She told me, "I'll do no such thing. I wouldn't have the town of Lurgan talking about me." She was indicating that she was sufficiently independent and had saved enough money to buy the cooker. She was also indicating that she did not believe the system to be watertight, and that if she did apply there was no guarantee that it would be in confidence. That lady did not believe that her application would be in confidence because of the rumours and talk that one hears throughout Northern Ireland about the abuses of the system.

For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) will no doubt be aware of the strong rumour that a firm in Newry will remove one's furniture, store it and return it when required, thereby enabling the householder to make a large claim for furniture under the single payments system. No doubt that firm will be happy to furnish the individual with a receipt to prove that he was entitled to the £1,000 that he received.

There is also a rumour in my constituency that if someone gets a single payment of £350 he can approach a "dealer" who will buy the cheque for £250 and furnish a receipt. The single payment was not designed to enable people to line their pockets with £250 or to allow a so-called "dealer" to take a £100 cut.

I asked another of my hon. Friends what he considered to be the worst abuse of the single payment system, and he told me that it was voluntary separation. A man and

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wife can agree to separate temporarily, and for some reason they seem to be assisted by the Housing Executive. The two partners then set up home independently and claim £1,000 or £1,200 to furnish those households. Consequently, they are reconciled, but £1,000 has been lost by that time. We have all heard of someone applying for a cot when there is one in the attic, merely because he wishes to cash the cheque.

I must accept a strict interpretation of the rules for elderly people applying for attendance allowance to help their relations support them within the bosom of the family. I also accept that great care must be exercised to ensure that there is no abuse of that system. But if a pensioner is to be taken off the higher rate of heating allowance and placed on the lower rate because of the number of radiators she uses, I want an assurance that the same effort is being made to prevent abuses of supplementary benefit, which now amounts to £250 million, £12 million of which goes on single payments.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Chris Patten): Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. I estimate that this year we shall be spending more than £20 million on single payments.

Mr. McCusker: That makes my point. If he has not already done so, I ask the Minister to investigate this matter. I appreciate that there are dangers in what I shall say, but is it possible to identify where most of that money is spent? I should not be surprised if it was spent in those areas of the Province where the Queen's writ does not run as it should. There are all sorts of pressures on all sorts of people in those areas to be extremely careful when dealing with these matters. If we are now talking about an increase from £1·5 million to £20 million in five years, action clearly needs to be taken. Now that the Minister has confirmed that figure, I look forward to an assurance that he is getting value for money in respect of every penny of that £20 million.

8.18 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Like the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker), I am sure that any hon. Member from Northern Ireland would express concern about attendance allowances. Such concern must be highlighted. The other matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred are also of the utmost importance, especially as the Minister has said that single payments this year will amount to £20 million. That must be looked at carefully. No doubt my hon. Friends will develop these matters further.

I wish to speak about Class I, items 1 and 2. Anybody who heard the Minister introducing the order and who did not know anything about Northern Ireland would think that Northern Ireland was to receive special aid which would put agriculture in the Province in a far better position than agriculture in any other part of the United Kingdom. I should like to underline what has been taken out of Northern Ireland agriculture and the cross which Northern Ireland farmers have to carry so that our view of special aid to Northern Ireland is put into its proper perspective.

On 12 November the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food told us of his intention to save £40 million in 1985-86. Those who know something about Northern Ireland agriculture will be aware that the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland has a special relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and that MAFF is a very important part of the administration of Northern Ireland agriculture. On 11 December the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced, in reply to a written question, that changes in the farm capital grants were estimated to save about £40 million. In other words, United Kingdom farmers will be £40 million worse off in 1985-86.

The new standard rate of grant in the lowlands under the agriculture and horticulture grant scheme will be 15 per cent. It was 20 per cent. In the less-favoured areas the new standard grant will be 30 per cent. Grant will no longer be available for land clearance and land reclamation. Those activities will be assisted in Northern Ireland only where the Minister says that they are essential to maintain farm incomes. The ceiling on the amount of investment that may be grant-aided will be halved, except for heated glasshouses and orchard replanting. Heated glasshouses in Northern Ireland are few and far between. Grants for orchard replanting will not be of very much help to Northern Ireland farmers. The limit per labour unit will be about £25,000, and the overall business limit over six years will be about £50,000—again halved.

The changes made under the agriculture and horticulture development scheme and the agriculture and horticulture grant scheme relate to the exclusion of certain land reclamation items and reductions in the rate of grant for field drainage, from 70 to 50 per cent. in the less-favoured areas, and from 50 to 32·5 per cent. in the lowlands. According to the Minister, the policy is to have a closer integration of conservation and agriculture policies through high rates of grant for certain agricultural works which are of benefit to the environment, and to exclude land clearance except for Northern Ireland reclamation works. That may be helpful in East Anglia, but it is not helpful in Northern Ireland.

The sugar on this pill is an increase in the rate of grant from 20 to 30 per cent. for hedges, walls and dykes built of traditional local materials and for associated gates. The farming community in Northern Ireland is told that more cereals should be grown. If it were to grow cereals, instead of erecting dykes and hedges and putting up traditional gates, the farming community in Northern Ireland would have to remove them. So that will not be of any real benefit to Northern Ireland.

I am trying to put these special aids for agriculture into their proper perspective, because the brakes have been firmly applied to the agriculture industry of the United Kingdom. What was described by the Government as savings in 1985-86 have turned out to be a major change in policy. For Northern Ireland, this is a serious matter. The changes made to the national schemes will apply to Northern Ireland. There are, however, two valuable supplementary schemes which have been recognised, and I give credit for that. I am pleased that Northern Ireland is to retain the grassland scheme and that it will continue to be paid for land reclamation. I am also pleased that the agriculture development programme in Northern Ireland is to continue. That programme is 40 per cent. funded by the European Economic Community, but I suppose that we should be grateful for small mercies.

The rates of grant and special supplement for the grassland scheme which applies to lowland areas remains unchanged, but the changes and reductions in the national capital grant scheme mean that the overall benefits to

farmers will be reduced. In the case of drainage, for AHGS relevant items the reducion will be from 45 to 30 per cent., and for AHDS relevant items the reduction will be from 55 to 37·5 per cent. The Ulster Farmers Union says that under this announcement Northern Ireland stands to lose £14 million. This means that farmers in England, Scotland and Wales will lose £26 million. That adds up to £40 million. Does this seem to be a fair proportion for Northern Ireland—a loss of £14 million compared to a loss of £26 million in Great Britain? I believe that it is a disproportionate loss to Northern Ireland agriculture. I hope that the Minister who is to reply to the debate will be able to help us about that problem.

The effect of the EEC farm price agreement for 1984 is having a depressing effect upon farm incomes. Farmers must spend money in order to earn grant. They have been caught in a pincer movement. The future looks bleak indeed for our most important industry. I am pleased that the Minister who introduced the order pointed out that 13 per cent. of all those employed in Northern Ireland are employed in agriculture. Nearly £250 million worth of our exports came from the farming industry. This industry is very important to Northern Ireland.

That leads me to the other very important inroad that has been made into Northern Ireland agriculture. The milk quotas will take about £20 million out of the agriculture industry. This will result in a total reduction of £34 million, while we are given aid amounting to £10 million.

I am sure that both Ministers on the Front Bench know the views of Northern Ireland dairy farmers. I am sure, also, that the figures that we have been given today about the quota that will be available will come as no surprise to those of us who know what is happening to the dairy industry in Northern Ireland. We are in a very serious position. That situation should never have arisen, and that is why the dairy farmers in Northern Ireland strongly condemn the Government for their handling of the matter.

The Milk Marketing Board in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Farmers Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Organisation, together with the three Members of the European Parliament from Northern Ireland, the right hon Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and I, met Mr. Dalsager, the Commissioner for Agriculture, in Strasbourg. He told us that the purpose of the 65,000 tonnes allocation was to give more to Northern Ireland, because of the position of our agriculture industry within the United Kingdom. It was proposed that when the United Kingdom quota was settled Northern Ireland should get an extra 65,000 tonnes. To our cost, we know that that 65,000 tonnes was not given to Northern Ireland. It was spread throughout the United Kingdom, so that we got little more than 5·5 per cent. of it. That is why there is so much bitterness in Northern Ireland. We were told in Europe that we should get more, but we did not get any more. The jewel of Northern Ireland agriculture—the dairy sector—has been kicked into the gutter and will face serious problems.

Panels and tribunals have been set up, but when they give judgments the Government are not able to give allocations to those for whom they were intended. We spend money on a system to investigate hardship cases and to allow people to put their case to tribunals. Those people win their cases, but they still face serious problems. Some cases have already been adjudicated upon and the appeals machinery has been used. People who have brought those cases have been told that they will get a bigger quota. But how much will they actually receive? That question needs to be answered.

The Prime Minister said that until every member state of the EC pays the levy the British Government will not collect the money. We should remember that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that will have to pay the levy. Therefore, our farmers want to know what the future holds.

Dr. Boyson: I referred at a recent Question Time to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about the milk levy. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced in a written answer today:

" We are fully committed to the milk supplementary levy arrangements agreed by the Agriculture Council in March. It is clear from last week's Council discussion and from the position adopted by other member states that there are differences in the interpretation of the rules and uncertainty about the amount of levy due. We are, therefore, suspending action for the time being. We are keeping the situation under review and are ready to collect and pay over any levies that may be due from us once the legal position becomes clearer and other member states are conforming to the requirements." — [*Official Report*, 17 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 37.]

I have not discussed the matter with the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but it seems that we are not paying any levy at the present time.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I welcome that reply, even though it only puts off the evil day. Knowing something about Europe and about the Governments who have not taken even the first steps to legislate so that they can collect levies, I know that it would be the height of madness for us to demand payment from our people.

Dr. Boyson: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the different attitudes of various countries. It may be helpful if I point out that Belgium, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland are taking the same approach as we are. So are the Germans, except that they have already collected some levy, which they are holding on to. The position in other countries varies.

Rev. Ian Paisley: That statement will help the farming community, the Milk Marketing Board and everyone else in Northern Ireland. I trust that the Government will remain firm on the issue. I know that if the British Government had said, "We will not pay the levy," other countries would have used that as an excuse not to pay the levy either. Now the matter is in the court of those who have not legislated to enable themselves to pay the levy. I am glad that that information is out in the open.

Ministers in Northern Ireland will be confronted by people who feel bitter because they have been badly treated. The Prime Minister said that we would get an increased production allocation. Subsequently, that undertaking had to be withdrawn. We were also told that we would be as well off as the rest of the United Kingdom. Now we find that Northern Ireland farmers do not get the same as British farmers for their finished products.

Northern Ireland agriculture faces a serious problem. The Minister of Agriculture said that that was a thing of the past, but it will never be a thing of the past. I trust that, even now, we can find a way to alleviate the hardship of Northern Ireland's dairy farmers.

Agriculture in Northern Ireland faces other problems, but the difficulty experienced by dairy farmers

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overshadows the others. The beef sector faces problems, but I am glad that the intervention regime has been made to work in Northern Ireland. At one time we did not think that we would have the necessary storage space or get the rights that we ought to have as a member of the European Community to get our meat into intervention. I am glad that the pressures put on the Minister of Agriculture have been effective and that there is provision for intervention.

I understand that an application is before one of the other Ministers for blast-freezing accommodation and factory space in Northern Ireland. I hope that that space will soon be available, so that we shall not have to take produce from Northern Ireland. That would be a great help to our farming community.

We shall no doubt hear more about how the Minister hopes to allocate special aid. However, even with special aid, agriculture has been badly hit and will suffer severely in the coming year. As agriculture provides permanent jobs and maintains the heart of employment, a larger measure of aid should be made available for it. That is what the Minister's message should be to farmers tonight.

8.41 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) on that latter point because it may raise difficulties in that shopkeepers and industrialists may also look for more aid. We are debating a specific Appropriation order. I would be happier if we were doing so in a United Kingdom context because some of the issues that I shall raise may be applicable to other parts of the United Kingdom. I may appear to ask for something specifically for the people of Northern Ireland, but I shall deal with the division of the cheque of the nation to the needy, especially regarding Class X, Vote 2.

I welcome the Minister's statement that there has been an increase in the numbers who have taken up the severe disability allowance. Under the old scheme many deserving cases did not get it. I suspect that even yet all those entitled to it are not claiming it and that some who should receive it may not be entitled to it because of the way in which the rules are drawn. The rules were widened but they were drawn to exclude many people because the nation could not foot the bill.

How are the new policies on housing benefit working out under the new point system? I understand that anomalies are developing and injustices occurring. The housing authority introduced a fine point system. The normal bureaucratic process is to think of a number, double it, subtract 10 and come up with an answer. In some of our houses people were given points for having a kitchen dinette. However, we discovered that there was no specific measurement for a kitchen dinette. After several test cases it was acknowledged that a kitchen dinette was not specified. We thought we had won that, but then we discovered that there was no reduction in the rent and no housing benefit. When we inquired we found that, although there was no kitchen dinette, there was a living-room dinette. Therefore, the Housing Executive transferred the points across and charged people accordingly. Yet a house that is supposed to have a living-room dinette is no bigger. In many such rooms there is not space to put a table. At best one can have a drop-leaf table or a card table. Have there been savings in housing benefit for the Department?

There has been an increase in the basic pension, together with a re-examination of the allowances of those who hitherto had them. There is a case in my constituency that is typical of the sort of older people to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) alluded. The husband is more than 80 and the wife is more than 70 years of age. Previously, they were entitled to a heating allowance, which brought them in about £1 a week. They now have the increased pension. However, through regrading, the allowance has been reduced. That family has an overall increase of 3p a week. Top salary review boards, Members of Parliament and trade unions would not be satisfied if, at the end of a pay review when there was supposed to have been an increase in line with inflation, they were losing. As we are considering the Appropriation order, will the Minister say how many people are being adversely affected by the new arrangements?

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that that also bites upon payments for special diets as well as payments for heating?

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank my right hon. Friend for widening my point. The arrangement has an adverse effect on those with special diets. Can the Minister assure us that food prices have been reduced, and tell us how those who three weeks ago were entitled to a special rate to meet the needs of their special diet can get resources to meet their medical needs?

As I said earlier, I would be happier if we debated the matter in the context of the United Kingdom as a whole, because it bites throughout the kingdom. My constituents are not happy with it or the glib response from the Department and the Prime Minister that the policy is to give people more in their basic pension so that they can choose how they use their money. That sounds nice, but those who receive an increased pension and have other pensions or savings to augment it find that the Treasury claws it back in income tax. It is not simply that pensioners are automatically given more money to spend as they wish. Many pensioners will lose because the increased pension takes them over the margin for benefits.

I am even more worried about pensioners who are net losers. A caring Government and Parliament should never legislate willingly for that and then dismiss complaints by saying that it is rough and ready justice. Can the Minister tell us how many people have been affected in that way?

Tonight we are dealing with an appropriation in aid. What worries me about social services in Northern Ireland is that whenever there has been a shortfall in the Northern Ireland programme the Department that deals with social services has made no bids for money to meet people's needs. Perhaps in its wisdom or otherwise the Department decided not to trawl for that money. I am referring especially to the problems of the elderly who have done their best to maintain their dignity in the community. According to the rules, they are entitled to the provision of a telephone service, but because there is a shortage of cash in the Department such telephones are being rationed and social workers must tell those elderly people that they cannot have telephones. It is rationing by lists. *Time*

magazine has said that it is becoming a modern problem in medicine, with doctors hoping that people will die before they have to spend money to meet their needs.

Mr. Chris Patten: I may have misunderstood what the hon. Gentleman said, but I think I am right in saying that my Department suggested several ways in which some of the underspend might be used in the social services area. The Assembly disagreed with those proposals and our views were changed. I make no elaborate constitutional point on the issue, but the hon. Gentleman will discover that the Assembly and many others believed that the money should be spent on educational schemes rather than on DHSS schemes.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister is saying that the spending of the nation's money goes outside the remit of this Chamber. I am asking him why the Department did not put in bids for the specific services to which I referred. I assure the Minister that either here or in the Assembly I would have fought my corner on that matter. I have made inquiries and I understand that the Department did not put in a bid. Does the Department believe in the emphasis on community care and that we do not therefore need more money? If so, it is going in the right direction, although in the end it will cost the Department more than if it supported such people in the community.

I support the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann about the attendance allowance and ask for a little more understanding from those who conduct the final vetting. We live in an age of interdependence, but it would be utterly false to remove the pride of independence from the sick or the elderly. I have known doctors ask elderly people how well they can walk unaided. In many cases, those elderly people get up and do what we call in Ulster the rounds of the kitchen, holding on to the furniture and without using the Zimmer frame. They are then classified as being able to move unaided, and as a result they lose the mobility allowance or the attendance allowance.

I know a lady aged more than 80 who is remarkably fresh mentally and clear-eyed. She lives with her brother, who is aged more than 70. Her brother has managed to keep his car on the basic pension, but now he must give it up because they are not entitled to mobility allowance. Although he is looking after her, because of the way the axe comes down, he is not entitled to attendance allowance.

I draw the Minister's attention to the misuse of supplementary provision, which is creating an attitude that could not be described as helpful. I am thinking of a rehabilitation home for young people where those who have managed to obtain work are penalised whereas those who cannot find work are not. If a youngster is unemployed, his rent at the home is paid—it costs about £48 a week—and he is given £19 a week pocket money. His time is his own. However, if a youngster manages to find a part-time job, he is penalised by not being granted supplementary benefit. If a youngster must pay travelling expenses to go to work, he is worse off than the person whose rent is paid and who has £19 a week pocket money.

I hope that the review of the supplementary benefits system will do something more to help those who genuinely want work but who are not encouraged to find it. The Government speak about incentives and urge people to get up and do things, but in this case youngsters are encouraged to do nothing, to sit back and to relax. There is misuse of the supplementary provisions, especially of those for younger people. I am glad to see that within England, at any rate, there has been a growing awareness of this problem and I hope that the forthcoming reviews will come up with something positive.

I take this opportunity to welcome the increase in the Appropriation order, but I wish to highlight the needs and misuses. I agree with my hon. Friends about some of the abuses that have occurred. This is straying outside the order somewhat, but as the matter has been raised and as the Minister has thrown it back to us I take the opportunity of asking whether the Minister has had any reply from any sources in Northern Ireland about the possibility of the aid for transport for pensioners being put on the rates.

8.59 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I come to this House from a constituency with the highest unemployment in the United Kingdom and with a large farming community, in which the majority of the farmers have smallholdings. I appreciate and welcome any money being allocated to Ulster, and I appreciate the Minister of State's efforts on our behalf. He has shown clearly his interest in these matters since coming to Northern Ireland a short time ago, and I appreciate his grasp of the many problems, which he displayed clearly a few days ago when he addressed the Northern Ireland Assembly.

However, I wonder whether the Government fully appreciate the effect that the milk quota system is having, especially on the small farmers in my constituency. I was led to believe, whenever the matter was discussed, that the Government had it in their mind to safeguard dairy herds of about 40 cows. However, as the milk quota system is being applied, I find that there is a genuine suspicion that there is somewhere a desire to force the small farmer into liquidation and, rather than saving the small herd, a desire that the farmer with a small number of cows should be pushed below the poverty line and forced to rely on supplementary benefit. I assure the House that these are the genuine worries and concerns of the people whom I represent.

What assurances can the Minister give to those farmers who have already been adjudicated on? Will they receive the quota that they have been promised? The tribunals have sat and listened to the cases, especially hardship cases; and an extra quota has been given. What assurances can the Minister give to the farmers of my constituency and throughout the provinces on the likelihood of getting any of this quota? The Minister drew to our attention the fact that the outgoers scheme will fall far short of the Government's intentions for the initial estimation of the amount of quota that can be spread. I should like the Minister to direct his attention to that matter.

Farmers in Northern Ireland have been encouraged to invest in agriculture and new farm units. Up until the time that the quota came into existence, farmers were encouraged by the Department of Agriculture to go into milk production. After that encouragement, it is disgraceful that farmers are now being left high and dry and with a great financial burden on their shoulders.

Dr. Boyson: I do not think that what I can say will be helpful, but the hon. Gentleman has asked me a straight question on a matter that concerns everybody, and which has concerned me since I have looked at the figures. Originally, there was a cut of 6 per cent. plus a cut of 3

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per cent. The 3 per cent. cut was to provide extra resources for those who, on appeal, won the right to keep the extra number of cows producing milk on their farms. At the moment, all but 30·7 million litres of the clawback have been allocated, and that 30·7 million litres are still available for distribution. It was hoped to add to that what was expected to come back on the outgoers scheme. Originally, that was estimated to be 53·3 million litres. Since a lot of people are not going ahead with the scheme, having been given the right to do so and to get their money from it, I estimate that less than half that amount will come back. Let us assume that it is 20 million litres. That means that the total available for distribution in Northern Ireland amongst those who have won their appeals will be only about 50·7 million litres.

I have come into this in the middle of it, and the Northern Ireland farmers know about this better than I do. But it was obvious from the start to anyone who could add up that, with the tribunals being left to decide appeals, there was no means of getting the equation into balance. It depends how many appeals are allowed and the demand. We know that we can provide about 50·7 million litres, but we only know that now because fewer producers are outgoing than the number who intended to at the beginning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the Minister is seeking to make a second speech or whether this really is an intervention, but even ministerial interventions should be brief.

Dr. Boyson: Your intervention has saved me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Bearing in mind hon. Members' knowledge of these matters, I shall conclude my intervention immediately by saying that there was no means at the beginning of getting a balance, and there will be the Dickens of a job at the end to decide what is to be given to those whose appeals are successful.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank the Minister for his interesting intervention, though I am not sure that it was all that helpful. However, I hope that his hon. Friend, when he replies to the debate, will address himself to another question on the same subject. What has already been allocated of the 50·7 million litres by the tribunals so far? The Department should know the answer, and we shall be able to judge from it whether there is any reason for farmers to go to Dundonald house to have their appeals heard.

I suspect that, although some farmers will come back satisfied, having had their cases heard by the tribunals, they may be in for a disappointment when we come to consider the 50·7 million litres available. This is very serious, because the farmers have had a long wait. They have experienced months of deep concern and financial and other worries about this. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, they may come to a serious bump in the road when they discover that it is not possible to keep the promises that they felt were made to them at the tribunal.

Other hon. Members have raised a number of matters which are of the utmost importance to the people of the Province. Among them is the problem of housing benefit. I hope that the Minister will be able to say how the new points system for housing benefit is working in the Province. Only today I visited an estate in Watson Park, Omagh. The tenants told me that under the new rents system their aluminium bungalows, which they could be blown out of on a windy night, will be on a par with a normal Housing Executive house. That causes me great concern. Within the next few days I shall be asking the Minister about matters relating to this estate. There are many worries about it.

I draw the Minister's attention to housing benefit. I notice from the paper that Northern Ireland Housing Executive rents are going up again. I was a member of the board and felt strongly about those rents. We were always being told that rents in Northern Ireland compared favourably with those in England and Wales. Will the Minister tell the House tonight how they compare with those in Scotland? What is the average rent for a Northern Ireland Housing Executive property compared with that of Scotland? When I was a member of the board there was a considerable differential. The problems of Scotland are no different from those of Northern Ireland. I hope the Minister will answer that clearly when he replies.

Mr. Chris Patten: Would the hon. Gentleman also like Northern Ireland to have the same expenditure, pro rata, on housing as Scotland?

Rev. William McCrea: I am sure that the Minister is fully aware that spending on housing in Scotland is through the local authorities. It was taken from the local authorities in Northern Ireland. If the Minister wants to tell the House tonight that he is handing housing back to the local authorities in Northern Ireland, it will be a most interesting statement. I shall be glad to welcome that as a former member of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive board because that is an unwieldy body and unfortunately it is far removed from many of the day-to-day problems of my constituents in Mid-Ulster or those of other hon. Members. I hope that the Minister will not run away from my question. Will he, for the record, tell the House the difference between the average rent in Northern Ireland and that in Scotland?

As the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) said, I do not know where all the people who are getting an attendance allowance come from. They definitely do not come from my constituency. I am delighted that there will be 500 new beneficiaries. I strongly believe that it is desirable to keep the elderly in the community. The Ulster people have an independent character that is in many ways commendable. The Government do not desire to put an extra burden on geriatric units or hospitals because there are already insufficient for the number of elderly people who desire to enter them.

I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member for Upper Bann that the majority of those being denied attendance allowance in the Province are honourable citizens who do not like to complain. That is the last thing they want to do. Indeed, the elderly in Ulster have always come from a proud stock and they do not like to say that they do not have the means to look after themselves. Indeed, when a doctor visits them they get into a nervous state and deprive themselves of many of the benefits which are their right because they are unwilling to plead poverty. That is the simple substance of the situation.

Some families are anxious to look after their elderly relatives, but there are many who are not. The House should — I believe that the Minister will — commend those families who genuinely care for the elderly in the

community. Everyone should salute them. Indeed, it is desirable to encourage more of that. I would wholeheartedly encourage families to show greater concern for their loved ones.

I turn to a point that has already been touched on. People rely on their local doctor. People are always told that their doctor is their professional adviser on health and that they must believe him. But he is believed only until it comes to benefits, and then it is said that the local doctor is not the man to rely on. I doubt whether the Government will disagree when I say that they probably have a better record than the Labour Administration on pensions and other benefits. Indeed, I think that I have heard the Prime Minister state that at the Dispatch Box.

But I assure hon. Members that ordinary pensioners do not find that they have a lot of money to spend at a time of cuts in the number of home helps and in the provision of telephones. Indeed, the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned that. It is like David in the scriptures, who said "no man cared for my soul". Many pensioners think that no one cares for their bodies either. Quite a few pensioners have come to speak to me about the 50p being taken off. Everyone got the addition to their pensions, but 50p was taken away from heating allowance. I know that 50p may not mean much to hon. Members, but I can assure them that it means a considerable amount to pensioners, to those on long-term supplementary benefit and to widows.

I should like to hear the Minister's comments, because I am told that the allowance amounts to practically nothing. I think that the hon. Member for Belfast, South said that his constituent got a 3p addition. Where is the allowance for inflation in that? People feel that they are worse off as a result of the change.

Like other hon. Members, I must express alarm about supplementary benefit. Every effort must be made to stop abuse. I do not believe that the number of investigators is sufficient. I speak as a former employee of the DHSS, and I feel sure that there is an inadequate number of personnel to investigate the abuse and skullduggery going on.

A few weeks ago I went to the DHSS about a very serious instance of abuse. One of the senior officials there told me that he knew that it was going on. Indeed, the mechanism of abuse was so great that there was an early warning system among the fishermen. Consequently, whenever someone from the Department was in the vicinity, the alarm was raised over the air waves, the boats were cleared and the men are able to live on supplementary benefit as well. It is alarming that a chief official at the Department should know that that is going on, yet say that there is nothing that he can do about it.

I know that many who genuinely need single payments are denied them. But many of us are worried that, although genuine cases are sometimes denied, those skilful in abuse are apparently able to get away with it. I shall give a typical example and invite the Minister to ask the business man concerned whether what I say is true. I raised the matter in another place and my case was not believed. A person desired a colour television. He was on supplementary benefit and put in for a special needs allowance. That person went to an electrician, a business man, and asked him to order a colour television and to make out an account for furniture. A television enclosed in a cabinet is regarded as furniture. To ensure that he got the best furniture and television, the person asked the electrician to ensure that the cabinet had Queen Anne legs.

The business man was worried. He asked, "Are you sure you are entitled to this?" The person promised him that he would be back immediately with a cheque. The business man thought that he would like such a television set himself and wondered whether to order it. He decided to but thought that he would never see the person again. Inside three days the person was back with a state cheque for his colour television in a cabinet with Queen Anne legs. That should be condemned, but it is not unusual. The hon. Member for Upper Bann talked about buying cheques. My friend the business man told me that he was offered £230 if he would buy a cheque. In that one-off payment he would be allowed to keep the £230. He was not willing to buy the cheque.

I find such incidents alarming. The Minister is also worried. He has said so in the Province. What action is being taken on the ground to ensure that that practice is stopped?

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would help the Minister if a close examination were made of those business premises which cash such cheques? Does he accept that honest and upright business men refuse to accept the cheques or to participate in fraud?

Rev. William McCrea: I agree wholeheartedly. That is a matter which should exercise the Minister.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, South said, there are parts of our country in which the Queen's writ does not run. Government officials cannot go to parts of the Province. In another place I described a typical example involving a television licence. The official was investigating. He was taken out of his van, stripped, sent back and told, "Appear again and you'll get a bullet through your head." In that area, licences do not have to be paid and yet people in the rest of the community have to pay their licence fees. I do not suggest that they should not pay; I suggest that everyone should pay.

A special calibre of officer is needed to go into some of the areas because he might be putting his neck on the block.

Mr. Chris Patten: Extremely committed and brave officers do such work and go into every area in the Province. I have discussed the problem with them. The hon. Gentleman makes serious and important allegations about individual firms and abuses. I hope that he will bring those cases to my attention and we shall pursue them in the normal way. General allegations are not worth much unless one has specifics on which to act.

Rev. William McCrea: I accept that the allegations are serious. As with other serious allegations, they have been brought before the House. It is appropriate and proper to exercise my right to draw the attention of hon. Members to these matters. I shall seek to do so as quickly as possible.

Whether or not the Minister accepts it, there are vast areas of the Province where few charges are brought against those fiddling the social services. I should be delighted if the Minister would reveal the figures. What charges of fraud are being brought, and how many stick?

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. I have been glad of the opportunity to do so. Indeed, it would be wrong if I did not welcome funds for Northern Ireland.

9.26 pm

Mr. James Nicholson (Newry and Armagh): I wish to address myself to Class I, Vote 1. I welcome anything that improves the facilities of our agricultural colleges. However, I must make it clear that I only welcome improvement to the existing system—the funds should not be used to purchase additional land for the colleges.

An agricultural college in the Province recently bid for land against local farmers and the price rose to more than £3,000 an acre. It is bad enough when farmers make fools out of themselves by bidding land to exorbitant prices, but when they bid against the Department it is quite ridiculous. The Department does not have to worry about milk quotas, about the troubles in the intensive sector or whether the pigs will pay. Quite frankly, the farmer does not stand much of a chance. I hope that that will never be repeated.

There is sufficient land within the control of the Department in Northern Ireland, and the colleges should not need to bid against the farmers for additional land. There is no point in educating our young if, when they return to their farms, they cannot expand. Our young farmers must be given their heads and must be allowed to expand. When I left school I would have been severely disadvantaged if I had had to face the problems that many young people face today.

Our farmers are not allowed to expand their milk production—the one profitable area of agriculture where they can see a return month by month. More importantly, their bank managers can see that return. They can count on repayments being made against borrowing. The Government's present policy does not allow that.

Restrictions were announced last week on farm capital grants, and that will cause difficulties to the agriculture industry. I agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) about the severe difficulties that will arise in Northern Ireland from the reduced grants. The hon. Gentleman talked about a £14 million reduction out of an overall reduction of £40 million. I received a written answer from the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which he said that Northern Ireland will suffer a reduction of £13 million. I am sure that the hon. Member for Antrim, North will not disagree with me over £1 million. However, it is most unfair that the small six counties of Northern Ireland should be asked to bear one third of the reduction in the agriculture budget for the entire United Kingdom. I do not think that that proposal will bear scrutiny. I hope that the Minister will consider it further and tell us at a later stage why he thinks that it is fair. I shall be most concerned if the proposed reduction is implemented.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the estimate of the Ulster Farmers Union is not so very far out. We often find with the Ministry that £1 million is neither here nor there, but is of much greater concern to the farmers from whose pockets it will have to come.

Mr. Nicholson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that £1 million would be considered extremely important by Northern Ireland farmers. It is only right that we should stress that Northern Ireland is expected to accept one third of the cut for the entire United Kingdom.

I direct myself to milk quotas, the buy-out scheme, the administration of the scheme and the consequent costs. Milk quotas have been with us for a short time but they have caused many problems for farmers, politicians, the Government, those involved in the manufacturing industry, those engaged in the ancillary industries and those who depend on agriculture for their employment. We all know that there has been a reduction in employment because of the implementation of the quotas. I do not wish to repeat everything that has already been said about the quotas but there are many grey areas that must be clarified. I have spoken about those issues on a number of occasions in the House and unfortunately we have not found answers to many of the questions.

The production allocation of 65,000 tonnes remains the burning issue. In the first six months, Northern Ireland producers started paying in excess of £5 million in levy. I hope that there will be a ministerial statement this evening even if its effect is only to put off the evil day of reckoning. At least that will give us a breathing space to enable us to ascertain how things will work out as the months progress. No other part of the United Kingdom has any levy to pay, or has had to do so. The United Kingdom is still falling far short of the overall national quota that was determined as part of the Brussels agreement.

Many of us contend that the 65,000 tonne production allocation that was set in the Brussels negotiations never reached Northern Ireland. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food maintains that it did. The whole problem has been cloaked in mystery. I still cannot accept that we have been informed correctly, especially in view of the statement made by the right hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Butler) when he was the Minister of State responsible for agriculture. He made that statement during a dinner on 29 April at the Ulster Farmers Union and in numerous press releases issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The press release of the speech made at the annual dinner of the Ulster Farmers Union stated:

"those who contributed most to the surpluses through increasing production since 1981 should stand the biggest cutbacks. Such a principle applied to Northern Ireland would have been little short of disastrous: a 15 per cent. cut in overall output against 1983. Under pressure from the United Kingdom the EC Agriculture Ministers agreed that Northern Ireland had to be specially treated. The result, as you know, was a special allocation of 65,000 tonnes to Northern Ireland. Then the Agriculture Ministries of the United Kingdom agreed a further special allocation; and the possible 15 per cent. cut was reduced to 6 per cent."

On 26 April 1984, the Minister replied to a question I raised by stating:

"The 65,000 tonnes allocation has certainly gone to Northern Ireland. The allocation between the regions of the United Kingdom was initially based on 1981 levels of production, to which was added a special quota of 65,000 tonnes agreed between the EEC Agriculture Ministries. A further addition of almost the same amount was then agreed between the Ministers responsible for agriculture in the various regions of the United Kingdom." — [*Official Report*, 26 April 1984; Vol. 58, c. 875.]

Those two statements complement each other. They were not off-the-cuff speeches about a one-off possibility.

Where has the 1981 allocation plus 1 per cent. quota gone? Where has the amount from England, Scotland and Wales disappeared to? The Minister, who then had responsibility for agriculture, told us what would be the solution. That was the position of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture until the end of June this year. What changed all that? The position was changed in the House on 3 July. The Minister of State told us when presenting the regulations that it was not the 1981

allocation plus 1 per cent. quota. That milk would not flow from England, Wales and Scotland to Northern Ireland. I do not know whether the Government were forced to change the provision because of earlier discrepancies in the regulations. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—the hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) — replied to my question by stating:

"The allocation of quota between the regions of the United Kingdom was based on deliveries in 1983, but in the calculations we have taken account of the trend of deliveries since 1981, and that includes the rapid growth in deliveries in Northern Ireland as compared to the other territories."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 235.]

Therein lies the difficulty that faces Northern Ireland agriculture. The important phrase is

"taken account of the trend of deliveries since 1981".

That proved to be important for Northern Ireland. It meant that England and Wales received a cut of 6·25 per cent. on 1983 production; Scotland received a reduction of 6·39 per cent.; but Northern Ireland received a reduction of 10·35 per cent. That reduction of 10·35 per cent—this is the argument that is put forward—includes the 65,000 tonnes, which brings us back to the reduction, on the 1981 figure of 5·83 per cent. Northern Ireland should not have been treated differently from any other part of the United Kingdom. The Government have used that excuse to justify their action. The spirit of the Brussels agreement was not honoured.

We have spoken of the trend in deliveries. That is what the figures are based on and the argument that is used. I gave the Minister of State some figures about the trend in deliveries in other areas. If other areas had received the same treatment as Northern Ireland, we should have had more difficulty in arguing our case. The islands of Arran, Bute, Coll, Tigh and Great Cumbrae increased their production by 14·4 per cent. The Orkneys increased production by 19·4 per cent. and the Shetland Isles by 26·8 per cent. between 1981 and 1983. I do not argue that the Orkneys and the Shetland Isles should not have received the consideration that they have. I have no doubt that they were entitled to that consideration because of their remoteness. The increase in production within the Aberdeen district milk marketing area was 11·7 per cent.

Will the Minister tell the House tonight whether the areas I have mentioned received a more severe cut based on trend in deliveries than other parts of the United Kingdom? He and I know that that is not what happened. That is how the Northern Ireland argument for fair treatment under the trend deliveries has arisen. Northern Ireland's isolated position within Europe and its difficulty in reaching markets means that we should have received the 65,000 tonnes that was awarded to us in Brussels. We did not receive it, and that is our main problem.

That places Northern Ireland dairy farmers at a serious disadvantage compared with their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom. The figures that I have given illustrate that. Northern Ireland's case for the 65,000 tonnes is accepted by everyone but the Minister. He appears to be the only man living who does not accept it.

I shall refer the Minister to a good booklet produced by the Select Committee, which deals effectively and efficiently with the problem of the Northern Ireland milk quota. The Select Committee called upon the Minister to clear up the matter, not tomorrow but immediately. I reiterate that call tonight.

I should like to refer to the buy-out scheme and its effects. In reply to part of a speech that I made on 3 July, the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

"In addition, I hope that the hon. Gentleman has noted that we have selected Northern Ireland for special treatment under the outgoers scheme. As a result of buying out 5 per cent. of Northern Ireland in the outgoers scheme, as opposed to 2¼ per cent. in Great Britain, we shall be spending £4·73 million more in Northern Ireland than if we had applied the same percentage as in the rest of the United Kingdom. We have adopted this approach because we recognise the special problems of Northern Ireland, which include an especially high number of small producers. That is why we have given it favourable terms under the outgoers scheme."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 235.]

After what the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, told us about the amount that is available in the outgoers scheme, the amount of milk that is to be bought appears to have diminished. We were told that the outgoers scheme would be a panacea for the dairy problem in Northern Ireland. However, we find that it has not worked. It was never going to work, and we can now say that it has not worked. Why? Because the farmers of Northern Ireland, who depend on the milk industry, could not afford to take up the scheme. They had to cut back to the required level because there was no other option for them. They could not expand into grain or any other part of agriculture as farmers could in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I ask the Minister what proposals he has to make up the shortfall to which the Minister of State referred on 3 July. We were told that the scheme would be the panacea to solve the problem. What proposals does the Department have to make up the shortfall? If I understand the Minister correctly, there are roughly 50·7 million litres of milk left to Northern Ireland. We have been given the figure of 5,000 litres per cow. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) is right in his calculation, when he tells me that that means that there are 10,000 cows to be shared out among all the farmers who are competing daily at Dundonald house for quota. That means that there are about 15,000 or 16,000 litres per applicant, in special cases. However, those are only rough figures. If that is so, I think that the Minister will not disagree that it will not solve the problems—and they are great; they are vast. I sometimes shudder when I wonder how they will be solved.

Daily, I receive telephone calls from farmers, not only in my constituency but outside, asking me how they can improve their position. They tell me the position that they are put in by the Department of Agriculture schemes in which they have participated in all sincerity. They tell me that they have purchased land on the strength of increasing their dairy herd and making the repayments. I cannot reply adequately to the farmers. I sincerely hope that the Minister will tell us that there is a chink of light at the end of the tunnel, because 50 million litres is nowhere near what is required to deal with the problem in Northern Ireland.

I should like to refer to farmers in the rest of the United Kingdom in a similar position, who have applied to participate in the scheme. From what the Minister told us, I do not know what percentage a farmer who has achieved a secondary quota will receive in the final analysis. I doubt whether even the Minister knows. We shall be shocked and dismayed, and there will be even more anger and

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resentment if farmers in the United Kingdom get 100 per cent. of secondary quota while farmers in Northern Ireland receive only 40, 50, 60 or 70 per cent.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Or 25 per cent.

Mr. Nicholson: That may well be, but I did not want to go that low. That would be unacceptable to the farmers of Northern Ireland, just as I hope it will be unacceptable to the Minister.

Mr. Maginnis: I do not want to distract my hon. Friend, but is he aware that a particular problem affects a limited number of dairy farmers which under the present system seems to be insoluble? That is the problem of dairy farmers who over the past eight, 10 or 11 years have, through terrorism, been forced to leave farms that are close to the frontier with the Irish Republic. They have held on to their land in the hope that the violence would decrease and they would be able to return to continue dairying, which they have done for generations. But when they go to the Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal to argue for a quota, they are told that as they have stopped milk production, perhaps 10 years ago, there is no basis on which their application can be judged. Consequently, they are penalised yet again. They have received no compensation for being forced to move from their farms because of terrorism, nor have they any hope of returning to continue their farming if things improve.

Mr. Nicholson: I thank my hon. Friend for his valuable and learned contribution. He makes a valid point. The Minister has no doubt listened to it and will perhaps in due course comment on it. It is a matter that will cause concern to the farmers placed in that invidious position.

It is fair to say that no other bureaucratic body, in an attempt to solve one problem, could have created a greater one. The EEC, with which we are all saddled, has forced a monster on us. Day after day, farmers throughout Northern Ireland travel to Dundonald house to face tribunals in an attempt to secure secondary quotas, but the number of such quotas is insufficient. They must all fight for the small amount available. I must express my distaste and anger at the cost of administering and processing these appeals. It is a total waste of public money and is unjustifiable, even though those attempting to administer the regulations have a difficult and thankless task which I do not envy. The total cost is £370,000—£220,000 to run the panels and tribunals and £150,000 to the Milk Marketing Board to administer any awards that may result. When that is placed against the £800,000 which was set aside for the buy-out scheme, it means that almost half of the amount which was to be paid to farmers is being spent on administrative and bureaucratic nonsense. This has been brought down on our heads by what I consider to be the worthless organisation known as the European Economic Community.

It has been brought to my attention that there are apparent discrepancies in the awards which are made to Northern Ireland farmers. If the tribunals were able to demonstrate a 100 per cent. success rate, I have no doubt that everybody would be assured that a fair allocation had been achieved, but that is not possible. Farmers come to me and say that they have been treated unfairly. There must be another way in which to look at the small number of cases where farmers believe that they have been treated unfairly. Having fought a large number of cases at tribunals, I believe that there are some cases that do not appear to have received a fair and just reward.

I welcome the continuing aid that is to be given to the pig and poultry industry. Given help, these two industries will have a chance to survive. However, I am most unhappy about the Department's attitude towards the intensive sectors of agriculture in Northern Ireland. If they put their mind to it, ways could be found by which intervention grain could be brought from Europe to Northern Ireland. Farmers could also be encouraged to grow more grain. Although we may never be self-sufficient in grain, Northern Ireland could be encouraged to become more self-sufficient than it is now. This must be one of the top priorities for the Minister. This policy would not only help the agricultural industry but would also have spin-off effects. Intensive sectors of agriculture in Northern Ireland would result in an increase in employment throughout the length and breadth of Northern Ireland.

Marketing must be improved. However, to say that marketing must be improved could be used as a very lame excuse to justify areas where marketing is bad. Although marketing must be improved, it must be improved in conjunction with proper and planned expansion. Agriculture in Northern Ireland is showing more foresight than was shown in the past. However, it must show more determination to improve. That has been lacking for a long time.

I am not very happy about the way in which the SPP has been established. It is yet another quango. The House knows my views on nominated boards and quangos in Northern Ireland. There are far too many of them. This is yet another quango. Because of my prejudices, it may be that I am being totally unfair to it. However, I should like producers to have a greater say. They must not be abused. Similarly, the SPP must not be abused by those who have been appointed as members. I ask the Minister to keep under scrutiny at all times the funds being spent by the SPP. I hope that the special land improvement scheme will ease some of the burdens, especially by means of a reduction of the farm capital grants in Northern Ireland.

The main problem of the past nine months is that we have been so involved with milk quotas that we have not paid enough attention to other equally important problems facing agriculture in Northern Ireland. For example, we have not paid enough attention to the intensive sectors or to the beef sector. Agriculture is Northern Ireland's largest and strongest industry. I hope that Ministers will work hard to ensure that it survives and flourishes.

10 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The guide to Supplementary Estimates for services in Northern Ireland gives a number of reasons why such Estimates may be produced.

The reasons include securing

"the authority of Parliament to use money already voted for particular purposes to meet expenditure on other services within the same vote. This is commonly done when the allocation is substantial, likely to be controversial or involves a new service. In other cases, the authority to approve reallocations of this sort . . . has been delegated to the Department of Finance and Personnel."

I can understand the need for Supplementary Estimates when there is a new service or when a matter is controversial, though what is controversial may be a matter of opinion. However, I should like an explanation of what "substantial" means. Is it substantial in relation to the sum involved, or substantial as a percentage of the sum originally allocated for a service? Given the differing sizes of the sums allocated, I cannot see that they can all be regarded as substantial.

A number of hon. Members have spoken about the problems created by the milk quota system and about the changes in farming grants. In a press notice on 12 December, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said:

"The planning figure for Agriculture for the coming year was increased in last year's Survey to allow for local support to be maintained at a substantial level."

When one realises that the support for certain schemes has been cut by at least £13 million, one wonders what the Secretary of State meant by "a substantial level". There appears to be a considerable decrease, both in total sums and in the percentage of the public input into Northern Ireland farming.

A Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food press release said that there would be an increase in the money available for work on hedges and for other schemes. I find it difficult to believe that there will be so little extra money for that work that the overall decrease in the rest of the United Kingdom will be as small as it appears to be. I also find it difficult to understand how as much as two thirds of the decrease will be in Great Britain. I find it impossible to visualise the farming community in Great Britain being so sparse in its grant aid schemes that only £26 million or £27 million will be chopped, while in Northern Ireland we are so anxious to spend money that we lose £13 million. We need a full explanation of how that has happened.

We must look beyond farming when we consider the sums of public money that are being invested in it. The cut will mean that schemes which were reasonable to carry out at the higher rate of grant are no longer viable. We are not considering a cut in spending of £13 million but a much larger cut in public and private spending. That is bound to have a wider effect than is generally realised. When farmers undertake a drainage scheme, they buy pipes, which provides employment right back to the smelt works, and considerable amounts of gravel. All in all, schemes provide an enormous amount of labour. That trend is echoed throughout agricultural grant schemes. When the Minister considers the loss to the commercial life of Northern Ireland, he will find that it would have been better never to have made the saving. The volume of work in Northern Ireland is such that one third of the United Kingdom's savings is made there.

Land reclamation schemes have been retained in Northern Ireland when they have been wiped out in the rest of the United Kingdom. I cannot believe that the differences in agricultural practices in Northern Ireland compared with Scotland or hill areas in England and Wales are such that there is no need for the work to continue.

I cannot envisage how much worse off Northern ireland would have been if land reclamation grants had disappeared there as well. We are to lose £30 million. How much more would we have lost if the land reclamation scheme had also been wiped out? We were told that it was kept in Northern Ireland because it was essential to maintain incomes. What is the Government's thinking regarding farm incomes in Northern Ireland over the next few years? I think that the Government expect a decrease in farming incomes and that they are saying to the farming industry that it must learn to sustain itself in a much harsher economic climate. The Government talk about maintaining incomes, not increasing them. If it is necessary to maintain hill land incomes — that is besically where land reclamation work takes place—the Government are expecting a decrease in farm incomes generally.

Finally, I shall quote a passage from the MAFF press release for supplies to Northern Ireland. It states:

"The changes will come into effect immediately in respect of expenditure under the AHGS incurred after December 11, and new applications or variations under the AHDS, and variations under the FHDS, received after that date."

Is it normal that such expenditure changes should come into effect immediately under the AHG scheme, but only in respect of new applications under the other two schemes? If this is a departure from normal practice, we should be told how it will affect the schemes that farmers already have in hand. If it represents a change, why has it been introduced now?

10.10 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) in welcoming the new Minister State, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson), to his first debate on Appropriation in aid for our beleaguered Province. In the short time that he has been with us, our new Minister has pursued his brief with flair, sympathy and understanding, and he has shown great readiness to come to grips with the many complex problems of his Department. My remarks in this debate will be directed to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), who has made many fact-finding visits throughout the Province. His dedication and his wide knowledge of the matters dealt with by his Department are well known.

I refer first to Class X, Vote 1. I note the Government's anxiety about unemployment in Northern Ireland, which is shared by all those who represent the Province. I support most of the measures announced in the public spending plans, and note that there has been a slight increase over expected inflation. Although that will not improve job prospects, it will at least maintain those that we have. It is regrettable that law and order expenditure has reached such proportions, but the provision of another 500 jobs in the police force is at least a consolation.

I welcome the Government's approach to the measures outlined in Class X, Vote 2, and their recognition of the fact that additional expenditure is necessary to combat the social deprivation caused by our geographical location, the civil unrest in the Province and the poverty with which we must contend. It is generally accepted that Northern Ireland is the most deprived area of the United Kingdom. As a result, families derive substantially more of their incomes from benefits, while at the same time they must pay more for food, clothing and fuel.

I am pleased about the introduction of the severe disablement allowance, which will replace non-contributory invalidity pensions, but I am disturbed by several aspects of the implementation of the criteria. I realise that there must be a test for incapacity, and I am glad that the Government have given a lead by publishing

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the document entitled, "Guidance in Adjudicating for Medical Practitioners", which will be available at all DHSS offices.

Nevertheless, some cases will be more complex than others, and I am worried that people who could qualify for benefit now will not qualify because they do not meet the 80 per cent. disablement test, although they may be incapable of working. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) that people who are severely incapacitated should not have to prove such incapacity from time to time to retain their right to benefit. I should have thought that where medical records showed a permanent incapacity, such persons should not be required to present themselves at tribunals, which subjects them to a painful and exhausting experience with which they are completely unable to cope.

I am glad that in section F1, of the Autumn Supplementary Estimate for 1984-85 the Government have responded to the needs of the aged for help with heating costs. I draw attention to the plight of those elderly who have homes which are difficult to heat. Many of these are large family homes which are ideal for bringing up families but which have deteriorated and fallen into disrepair after the families have grown up and moved to homes on their own. In most cases there is no alternative accommodation available to those who are left behind. These people are left to live in unsuitable houses and such grants as are available for extra heating are soon exhausted, particularly as the price of coal is £10 per tonne more than on the mainland.

In section F2, I note that there are an increasing number of claims for single payments. There are many and varied circumstances when a single payment is necessary, but, as has been said, the system can be abused. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) said that in many parts of Belfast there is evidence that crooked so-called business men are ripping off customers who come to them with welfare cheques issued under the single payments system. In my constituency, I have had reports of people being given substandard and secondhand articles not worth a fraction of the grant, and when people discover that the articles are not of an acceptable quality, they are told by these unscrupulous traders that their guarantee ended when they walked out of the store.

Another abuse of the system occurs where young people have applied for accommodation as a single person. On being allocated a flat, which is usually in a hard-to-let area, they immediately apply for a single payment for furniture. However, in most cases the allocation is not taken up and the recipient uses the grant for purposes other than that for which it was intended.

A matter that is worthy of consideration is the plight of prisoners' wives and families who wish to visit their relatives in prison. Most of us know that prisoners are allowed one visit per week, but close relatives can claim the cost of their journey to prison only once every four weeks. Therefore, it is distressing that the family entitlement to visit cannot be maintained where there is financial hardship, particularly among wives of ordinary, decent criminals who do not have access to, or wish to avail themselves of, paramilitary transport.

Section G deals with housing benefits. Attempts are being made to implement the system fairly for everyone who is eligible for help. The amended scheme now brings Northern Ireland generally into line with Great Britain. I note that there is now a high level of local liaison between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and its social security counterpart. Such a liaison highlights cases where supplementary benefit could be claimed, and the fact that the persons concerned in these cases are now advised about their entitlement is a step forward in the take-up campaign.

It has been recognised that the housing benefits scheme has had a smoother introduction into Northern Ireland, with fewer problems, than in many other parts of the United Kingdom, and the Government must be commended for their efforts in this direction. However, some Housing Executive tenants, although they appear to be gaining the benefits to which they are entitled, are nevertheless forced to live in houses which either need replacing or need expensive repairs. These are the tenants of the Orlit and similar types of houses. I ask that the executive announces its timetable for dealing with such houses.

Section A covers old pensions. Even with linked increases, inflation and increased costs are substantially reducing the real value of pensions. Any Government decision to impose VAT on printed products would undoubtedly affect them, as would an increased television licence fee.

The proposal that doctors should be obliged to prescribe medicines from a restricted list worries me. Unsuitable drugs might be prescribed which could put the lives of elderly persons at risk. The proposal must give cause for alarm. I hope that the implications of the proposal for this most deserving section of our population will be examined fully.

10.20 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I shall refer to two specific matters falling within the ambit of the order and then I shall come to two constitutional issues.

I had not meant to refer to Class X, Vote 2, until I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker). Now that I have heard him, I want to underline what he said on the subject of the attendance allowance.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) must be beginning to detect a certain uniformity running through much of the correspondence that he receives in his capacity as being in charge of health and the social services. I find myself writing to him rather more monotonously repetitive letters on this subject than I would wish, and I am sure that someone as sensitive as the Minister is to administrative implications will long ago have arrived at the conclusion that something must be wrong somewhere.

Something is wrong when one finds so often the irresolvable conflict between the advice given by the family doctor of an applicant and the conclusions arrived at by the doctor who examines that applicant in the course of an appeal.

There is somewhere in the application or the administration of the rules for attendance allowance a deficiency which is subjecting applicants to a great deal of harassment in the cases where they are ultimately successful—there are some of those—and is denying to other applicants the assistance to which they and their families were always intended to be entitled. I hope the

Minister will say that he intends to clear the board and address himself afresh to the administration of the scheme to find where the gremlin in it is.

Included in the matters falling under Class I, Vote 2, is the "improvement of livestock" and the "control of diseases". It is in that connection that I draw attention once again to the control of veterinary medical products because —and I quote the submission made to me by the Ulster Farmers' Union—

"it is a matter of concern to our own producers that certain materials in this field are under strict control in Northern Ireland, but not of in the Republic . . . the bona fide trade . . . is . . . disquited about the traffic in medicinal products which is apparently going on from the Republic to the Province."

It is not seriously disputed that the application of existing EEC rules in this respect leaves much to be desired on the other side of the frontier but is accurately observed in the United Kingdom. I tabled a question in October in which I asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he was doing about that. I have abbreviated the terms of the question, but the Minister's reply was even briefer. He said:

"This is a matter for the European Commission, and we have written to the commission about it."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 1114.]

That is not the sort of reply which most of our constituents would long tolerate about a grievance which they had put before us. It is not good enough for the Minister to have written to the Commission about it, if he has left it there. Therefore, I hope that when the Minister replies he will be able to confirm that that matter is being directly and actively pursued with the Commission with a view to bringing into line the country which lies across the border from Northern Ireland.

One of the main topics in this debate has been the working out of the milk quota scheme. Whatever else can be said about it—there is not much that is favourable—it is certain that it has caused an enormous amount of irritation, misunderstanding, disquiet and sense of injustice. How the scheme was going to work, how it was going to be applied, what the meaning was of the various assurances that had been given from stage to stage, remained obscure and in some cases remains obscure to this moment.

It occurred to me to investigate why it was that a scheme which affected the whole farming industry in the United Kingdom, and which affected differentially the farming industry in Northern Ireland, should still remain in such confusion and obscurity for nine months after its introduction. The reason is not far to seek, and it should not be far to seek, above all, here in the House.

The seeker after enlightenment on the working of the milk quota scheme requires to deal with three fundamental documents. They are all EEC regulations. The first is regulation 804 of 1968. The second is regulation 856 of 1984. The third is regulation 857 of 1984. By a careful reading of those three documents one can, at first dimly and then with increasing clarity perceive the outlines and the underlying principles—which are even, arguably, in some respects rational—of the milk quota scheme.

They are a remarkable collection of documents. Regulation 804 of 1968 set out, as I have said, the principles. In our language it would be called the principal Act—it is the CAP for milk—I am sure that that is an unofficial description—and it is constantly referred to in the documents which immediately impinge upon the farming industry in Northern Ireland and which repeatedly refer to paragraph 5 of the principal regulations—to the bewilderment at first of the student who finds no resemblance between article 5 of that regulation and what is being talked about. What has escaped his notice is that regulation 856 of 1984 virtually rewrote, or wrote a whole new regulation into, article 5 of the principal regulations of 1968. On that article as amended was built the trigger regulation 857.

One fact which is common to all those regulations is that they are Community legislation directly applicable in the member states. Each of them is directly applicable — the CAP regulation, the amendment of the CAP regulation, and then the inauguration of the milk quota scheme — it is all legislation made in Brussels which automatically takes effect in this country.

It seems self-evident that such legislation when it reaches into the very lives and farms of individuals in the Province will not be understood—that is almost to say, it simply will not be accepted — until it has been properly and publicly debated in this country. There is one sovereign way — that is not intended as a pun — of getting such matters properly understood and debated. That is to bring them before the House. But because of the EEC's legislative procedures, all that was involved in the milk quota scheme—how it would work, how it would impinge on individual farms — how the quotas were assesed and how the levy was to be drawn—was never thrashed out on this side of the English channel. The matter was never thrashed out, and, therefore, never properly understood, let alone accepted, because it did not have to come before the House. It did not even have to go before a Scrutiny Committee.

It is for another debate to declaim against the directly applicable legislation of the EEC. Suffice it to say tonight that we and the dairy farmers of the whole United Kingdom, and especially of Northern Ireland, have learnt by an object lesson just what it means to be legislated for by a foreign body which imposes its decisions, in effect, by decree.

I turn to another constitutional matter—one that it is within the Government's power to deal with. We are given to understand that the Government are in some difficulty over their programme for the current Session. That has been brought to our attention by the unprecedentedly early date at which we are to terminate our Christmas holidays and return from all the oceans and continents of the world to resume our deliberations on Wednesday 9 January. The Government are short of time — the very predicament most feared and dreaded by all Governments, particularly by all Government business managers. Yet in every Session three whole days in effect are devoted by the House to the business of appropriation orders such as that which has claimed our attention since about 7.30 pm tonight—there is still another hour to go, if we can find the means to apply Parkinson's law. One might think that some useful or necessary purpose was served by such orders. Those hon. Members who are anxiously wondering how soon the Division will be must naturally assume from the fact that they are about to be marched through the Lobbies that those parliamentary days are being used for some practical—I do not say "good", as I put the matter more modestly—purpose. Not at all.

It is not in order to provide these sums for expenditure in Northern Ireland that such orders are brought before the House. The sums eventually come out of the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom anyhow and would continue

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to do so, subject to the decisions of the House, even if these orders were heard of no more. Nor are these orders brought before the House to give Northern Ireland Members an opportunity to air their constituents' grievances on major matters of public concern. If they were, that would be a signal and peculiar instance of generosity towards Northern Ireland and its people on the part of those who sit in the seats of power. Not so: if this order was not taken tonight and if this procedure was disused, my hon. Friends and I would still be raising exactly the same subjects, perhaps with a little more concision and thereby a little more force, in the debate which is to be held on Wednesday.

No, Sir; the only effect and purpose of this expenditure of parliamentary time and effort on appropriation orders for Northern Ireland is to preserve an ancient absurdity —the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. This is a "Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland Preservation Order." That is what it is about.

Since the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland performs no ascertainable financial function, being only a receptacle into which money is poured in order that it may be poured out again, hon. Members may still be inquisitive to know why the Government attach so much importance to preserving this ancient and fatuous institution that they will spend three good days of parliamentary time per Session in preserving it. And, indeed, hope is growing that the Government are approaching the time when they will no longer wish to preserve the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland.

The original purpose of conserving the fund, with which this pantomime started some 12 years ago, was that Northern Ireland might, as far as possible, be a separable entity which could be floated off in the direction of an all-Ireland state. It was to render it essentially self-contained and separable that it was given the same sort of distinct Consolidated Fund and financial organisation as a self-governing dominion, in the hope that one day it would take itself off and go somewhere else.

That motive was disposed of with striking and beneficent clarity by the Prime Minister during and following the recent conference at Chequers. We know now, in a way that we did not previously know, that that is not the Government's intention.

Perhaps it might be said that Her Majesty's Government are still anxious to provide Northern Ireland with another Stormont — Stormont back again with Stormont's Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Chris Patten *indicated assent.*

Mr. Powell: The Under-Secretary of State, clutching at a straw, thought just now that he heard something in my discourse with which he could safely be seen to be agreeing. I suppose that the Minister "indicates assent" will duly appear tomorrow in the appropriate column of *Hansard*.

That is also out of date, however, because the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been brutally candid. With brutal candour he has explained the terms upon which—and upon which alone—administration or legislation will be devolved to the Province. They are conditions upon which there is no prospect of a devolved constitution being accepted or worked; and I do not think that the Secretary of State or Her Majesty's Government generally—if for such a purpose one can take them as a generality—are so stupid as to suppose otherwise.

So at last we have worked through to a time when the House can, without any loss whatsoever, be deprived of this tri-annual entertainment, a time when the business managers of the House can gain three days, a time when it is no longer thought necessary for any purpose — attainable or unattainable—to preserve the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friends and I, in expectation of that day and by way of giving, to this Government so far as is in our power, a gentle nudge from time to time in that direction, have made a habit in the last two years of marking our disapprobation of the motives behind this legislation, by voting against it. After all that, it should not come as any surprise either to the Whips or to the Ministers, to hear that we intend to do likewise tonight.

10.40 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) referred to our proceedings as a triennial entertainment and as a pantomime. As the festive season is approaching, I prefer the description of a pantomime. Like the Minister of State, I have spent some time reading in the *Hansard* the record of the debates on Appropriation orders. Having read them, I was surprised that such dehydrated topics as milk quotas, levies, outgoers schemes, and the quality of beef cattle production could be so interesting and scintillating. I shall seek to make equally cogent arguments on the same manifold subjects, although I doubt that I can match the level of articulation of other hon. Members.

Class I, Vote 1, of the supplementary Estimates spell out clearly the nature of the supplement as it relates to agriculture. Class I covers the administrative cost of the new milk quota arrangements and the compensation scheme for farmers who want to give up milk production, thus releasing quotas for reallocation.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) drew the attention of the House to the considerable bitterness about the quota arrangements in Northern Ireland. He declared that the jewel of our Northern Ireland industry had been kicked into the gutter. I originally thought that that was a mixed metaphor, but the industry would not be the worse for that—in fact, it was an accurate description of how some of the farmers feel about the quota arrangement, reallocations and penalties.

The reason for the bitterness was that the Government had announced that the first instalment of the levy on farmers who had exceeded their quota must be paid, notwithstanding that the European Commission had said that four member states had not implemented the regulations. The Minister was kind enough to tell the House that while the Government were fully committed to the mutual supplementary levy agreed by the Agriculture Council in March, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany had decided not to pay any levy because there appeared to be a confusion over the interpretation the rules. Only West Germany has collected some portion of the levy. It was a timely intervention that may assist in alleviating some of the bitterness felt by the farmers in Northern Ireland.

The Minister also took the opportunity to tell the House that he had sympathy with farmers who were attempting to make unwelcome and difficult adjustments. One additional source of bitterness is that no levy will be payable in Britain because of the summer drought that resulted in a drop in milk production. Production also fell in Northern Ireland—down 6 per cent. since April—but total production will still exceed the quota and up to 5,000 farmers will face the levy payments. The Ulster Farmers Union has claimed that individual payments could be as much as £20,000. The average will probably be more like £1,000 per farmer. The Government have estimated that about 2,000 farmers will exceed their quota.

The Northern Ireland farmers are bitter about the Government's decision to collect the payments—they may now be held in abeyance—because they feel that they never received the 65,000 tonne special allocation granted by the EEC specifically for Northern Ireland. That was referred to by several hon. Members. They believe that the special quota was subsumed into the special quota allocated to the United Kingdom overall. This issue was touched upon by the hon. Member for Antrim, North. I shall not attempt to untangle the entangled questions of milk quotas and levies as expressed and interpreted by the European Community and its Agriculture Council. Grievances may be perceived as well as being real; and I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State will wish to take an early opportunity to elucidate the true facts.

The Minister of State has said that 3,430 producers have applied for special treatment as hardship cases and that the claims are still being evaluated. In the meantime, producers who regard themselves as eligible for special treatment do not know whether they will find themselves in excess of the quota. The Minister has said that decisions have been taken in 1,788 cases and that provisional awards have been made in 540. He explained that the remainder would be dealt with over the next few weeks.

There is considerable confusion over the nature of the quota and whether it will be a salable asset. I understand that 595 farmers in Northern Ireland have applied to stop milk production and that the Government have said that all valid applications will be accepted. The 595 applications will yield 53·3 million litres.

In Class X of schedule 1 the sums to be paid out by way of expenditure by the Department of Health and Social Services on important items such as old-age pensions, attendance allowances and non-contributory pensions amount to £26·118 million. That figure must be seen against the overall background of social security in Northern Ireland. According to information provided by the Confederation of Health Service Employees in Belfast, social security statistics on the payments of sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and non-contributory invalidity pension show a level of demand in Northern Ireland that is 66 per cent. above that in Great Britain.

According to the same source, the incidence of severe disablement or incapacity based on attendance allowance statistics for Northern Ireland is 35 per cent. above the figure for Great Britain. There are higher birth rates and levels of infant mortality and handicap in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in Great Britain. There is a higher incidence of mental handicap. The level of new outpatients seen in Northern Ireland in 1982 was 51 per cent. higher than the comparable Great Britain figure. There is also a higher incidence of congenital abnormality and in 1981 deaths from this cause were 16 per cent. higher than those in England.

We welcome the fact that under the Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, severe disablement allowance will replace the non-contributory invalidity pension. We welcome equally the fact that the severe disablement allowance—the SDA—is for those who cannot work because of long-term sickness or disability and who have not paid enough national insurance contributions to qualify for contributory sickness benefit. It is to be welcomed that it is not means tested and is tax-free.

The Minister of State rightly said that the Supplementary Estimate of £26·12 million represents an increase of 6·3 per cent. on the original provision and declared that the largest increase sought is for supplementary benefit. We welcome, too, the reasons for the increase, which is a reduction from 70 to 65 years of age as the upper qualifying age for related heating additions and the introduction of a new, higher age-related rate. The Minister referred to an addition of £7·8 million

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for housing benefits. The reason for this additional supply is the increase in the number of eligible claimants and the increase in average weekly rebates and allowances.

The House has heard several criticisms of the housing benefit scheme. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) pertinently asked how the housing benefits points system is working. He declared that rents were being increased again. We note that under Class X the increase to cover rent rebates, rent allowances and rates rebates is the net result of a rise in the number of eligible claimants, and that this has been partly offset by changes in the housing benefit scheme, which has reduced the extent of the assistance.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will be well aware of the fact that the impact of the housing benefits scheme in Northern Ireland has given rise to some anxiety and criticism from hon. Members with Northern Ireland constituencies. Allegations are made that, because the scheme's administration is shared between the Department of the Environment, the DHSS and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, there are serious cases of administrative failure. People feel that the housing benefits scheme has been based on a novel principle—robbing one set of claimants to pay another. It is therefore not surprising that the housing benefits scheme was rejected by all political parties when it was proposed for Northern Ireland. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State took that aspect into account when he gave a clear undertaking to the Northern Ireland Assembly that no supplementary benefits claimant would be worse off because of this reform. We trust that that will be the case.

We have had an inseresting and long debate. It has been well attended, in the way such debates are, by those hon. Members who have listened to most of the speeches. The Labour Opposition support the order. We accept and understand the principle put forward by the right hon. Member for South Down, who wishes to make a constitutional point about the Appropriation order. The Labour Opposition believe in public expenditure as a principle. We believe that it helps to alleviate distress and that the appropriation order will assist those recipients of non-contributory benefits. We welcome the fact that more people will receive the severe disablement allowance than received the non-contributory invalidity pension. We welcome the £800,000 for attendance allowance, although we take on board the criticisms that have been made. We welcome the fact that married women can claim the disablement disallowance, even if they are about to carry out normal household duties.

We accept that there is confusion about the milk quotas and take on board the point made by the right hon. Member for South Down about Common Market legislation. The right hon. Gentleman said that these matters are decided elsewhere and give rise to different interpretations throughout the Common Market because we deal with many different nationalities, languages and technical matters that are difficult to grasp. We accept the new input into agriculture and understand the importance of agriculture to the economy of Northern Ireland. Every help should be given, and the Supplementary Estimates go some way towards giving that help.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Chris Patten): I believe I am right in saying that I have enjoyed the privilege of responding to every debate on Northern Ireland Appropriation orders since the last general election. I suppose that if I am particularly fortunate I shall be able to notch up the dubious record of replying to every Appropriation order debate during the entire Parliament. I realise that, for constitutional reasons at least, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) would not be too pleased with that idea, but that question is, of course, not entirely in my hands.

I welcome, as I am sure do all hon. Members, the hon. Member for Middlesborough (Mr. Bell) to our debates. I am sure that he will learn to enjoy them as much as the rest of us do. As on all these occasions, we have had a good and lively debate, which has ranged to the furthest limits of the order. The order is more limited in scope than some that we have considered in the past, but, nevertheless, the debate has covered a wide variety of subjects. I shall try, once again, to respond as adequately as I can to the main points raised. As usual, when I cannot cover a point today, or if I inadvertently pass one by in the night, I shall try to ensure that the hon. Member concerned receives a suitable reply as soon as possible from me or from one of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

A number of hon. Members have referred to social security. I shall make one or two general remarks about the Government's record on social security benefits in Northern Ireland, in view of what the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) said in his customarily well-informed speech.

We shall spend about £1·2 billion on social security benefits in the current year. As the House is aware, it is our policy to maintain parity with Great Britain in the rates and procedures applying for those wide-ranging benefits, and I believe that that policy has served Northern Ireland well.

At the same time, when we introduced housing benefits, which the hon. Member for Middlesbrough mentioned, in November 1983, which was a benefit system which allowed some measure of local discretion within the national framework, I was able to provide some local enhancement of the scheme; for example, a more generous transitional protection against losses, the inclusion of water charges within rate rebates and allowances and, for the time being, more generous needs allowance for children. We were also able to tailor the administration of benefits to local circumstances. Northern Ireland has a more localised network of offices than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and uniquely unemployment and supplementary benefits are delivered from the same local office.

The take-up of benefit in the Province already compares favourably with that in Great Britain, and is demonstrably higher in some cases. We have run some successful media campaigns in relation to particular benefits. More can and should be done. I have recently announced an extension throughout the Province of the information and advice service, which was successfully piloted in some of my Department's local social security offices.

Over the next year each local office will provide a separate advice point at which members of the public can

obtain information about the range of benefits available. We are also introducing a freephone service for those who cannot easily visit their local offices.

These developments have been welcomed by many local representatives and have been commented upon favourably by the Social Security Advisory Committee, whose close interest in Northern Ireland I greatly appreciate.

In these ways, and assisted by a flourishing welfare rights movement in the Province—a point to which I shall return in the context of the remarks of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker)—we are doing everything that we can to ensure that benefits reach everyone entitled to them. These efforts depend heavily upon the splendid and dedicated staff administering benefits in our local and central offices. I am pleased that hon. Members from Northern Ireland have often paid deserved tribute to their work.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann mentioned three matters on the social security Vote. I agree with him and the right hon. Member for South Down that attendance allowance is an extremely valuable benefit in that it can make the difference between an elderly or disabled person staying at home and having to be admitted to hospital. The view of the claimant's general practitioner is taken into account by the examining doctor, who must be satisfied that the conditions attaching to the allowance are met.

I accept the point made by the right hon. Gentleman about the administration of attendance allowance, on which, as he said, we have had a good deal of corresponsdence. I have had a good deal of correspondence on the subject with every hon. Member representing the Province. I am therefore prepared to consider further how the allowance is administered. I shall do so against the background of the Oglesby report, which reviewed the procedures for that and other benefits in Great Britain. I shall also consult the Attendance Allowance Board, which plays an important part in administering the scheme. If there are any gremlins still left in the system, as the right hon. Gentleman suggested there may be, I want to remove or perhaps exorcise them as rapidly as possible.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann will appreciate that I cannot readily deal on the Floor of the House with the case of his constituent who was denied higher rate heating addition. He will be aware that his constituent could take the matter to an appeal tribunal, or the hon. Member may wish to raise the case with me first for further examination.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Belfast, North referred to single payments under the supplementary benefits scheme. This is a subject about which I have learned an increasing amount as I have visited social security offices throughout the Province. As was said, the number of single payment awards has grown significantly in recent years—from 77,000 in 1982, to 126,000 in 1983, and, I estimate, to upwards of 200,000 in 1984. Expenditure in 1984 will be more than £20 million.

Although from time to time allegations are voiced about abuse of single payments, we have no evidence that this is a major problem. Clearly there is scope for abuse, but the Department of Health and Social Services does all that it can to prevent it. Home visits are made in most cases, and Girocheques are made payable to suppliers rather than to claimants where large sums are involved.

It is fair to say that one of the main reasons for the surge in single payments is the development of a thriving welfare rights movement, which I welcome. I intend to give support to that movement through a grant to a regional welfare rights resource centre. It is also fair to say that the single payments aspect of the supplementary benefits scheme is being given particular attention by my hon. Friend, who is leading the review of the scheme. I should not be surprised—I do not put the point any more strongly, and I have no inside information at this stage—if we saw changes proposed in this aspect of supplementary benefit.

Meanwhile, I assure the House, and the hon. Member for Upper Bann in particular, that we shall do everything possible both to encourage full take-up of all the benefits to which claimants are entitled and to check against abuse.

Mr. McCusker: Will the Minister say more about this group to which he intends to offer financial assistance? Who has selected it, and what justification is there for giving it public funds?

Mr. Patten: The justification is the belief, which I hold strongly—I should be surprised if I did not share it with hon. Members—that we should do everything that we can to encourage the take-up of benefits to which people are statutorily entitled. That should involve work by my Department, particularly by local social security offices, and by the voluntary sector. That has already helped considerably; for example, through the action for community employment scheme.

I want to make sure that, wherever possible, the voluntary sector works with the statutory sector to encourage take-up. That is why we have been discussing with the Belfast law centre how we can best help provide a resource centre and training for local welfare rights groups which are legitimately involved. There are a large number of local groups which at present are helped by district councils and through the ACE scheme and in other ways. I assure hon. Members that the provision of more training and advice centrally should enable us to have a more sensible take-up scheme throughout the Province.

When I hear hon. Members properly talk about constituents who are not getting the benefits to which they are entitled, I think that there is an obligation on us, through our local social security offices and through the voluntary sector, to do all that we can to make people aware of the things they are entitled to receive.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Minister not undermining the democratic process by encouraging voluntary groups of this sort and giving them almost statutory recognition? Can he assure us that a group such as this will be monitored in a way that will ensure that it is not exploited by organisations such as Sinn Fein—*[Interruption.]* I fear that it may be. Will the hon. Gentleman assure us that the members of this voluntary welfare group will be made known to those who have an electoral responsibility within the community?

Mr. Patten: The answer to the first substantive question of the hon. Gentleman is no. The answer to his second substantive question is yes. We are not talking about my Department giving grants to local groups but about giving funds to an organisation that is already heavily involved in helping local welfare rights activities. I have noted the point that the hon. Gentleman has made; it would be idiotic if we had not already done so. A great deal of this work has been carried on for some time with the Belfast Law Centre. We are discussing how it can help further.

Mr. Bell: Can I point out to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State that, while one understands the views which have been put forward tonight, we welcome the statement he has made that all those who ought to have benefit and who are entitled to benefit should be encouraged to have it and assure him that any steps that he may take in that direction will be warmly welcomed by us?

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his message of support. When hon. Members in other parts of the House note what is already happening and note also our intention to work closely with the voluntary sector to improve the quality of the advice that is provided, I hope that support in the House will be rather more widespread than it is now. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) asked a number of questions about social security and the expenditure covered by the Appropriation order. He referred initially to the Department of Health and Social Services and asked why we had not put in a shortfall bid for telephones for the housebound. Because shortfall money is available only for spending in the year in which it arises and because the expenditure on telephones which the hon. Member has in mind would be a recurring commitment for the health boards, it could not be covered in the way he suggested. The boards have been doing a great deal of work but they have to live within their budgets.

Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, asked questions about the housing benefit scheme. It is fair to say that the reformed scheme, to some of whose enhancements I referred earlier, has been operating reasonably satisfactorily in Northern Ireland. We have managed to avoid some of the problems that existed on this side of the water. However, reviews of the schemes are being undertaken in Northern Ireland as well as in Great Britain, mainly because of difficulties in Great Britain and concern about the rising cost of housing benefit. In the light of the reviews we expect to be able to publish proposals for change in the new year.

Hon. Members referred to the available scale margin. This is the amount deducted from certain additional requirements of claimants on the long-term rate of supplementary benefit. It was first introduced in 1966. It was intended to reflect the fact that the long term scale rate should cover nearly all additional needs, amounting at that time to 45p, the difference between the long term and the short term rates. Although the difference is now £7·65, the available scale margin remained at 50p, having been increased to that amount in 1968. To allow the previous relationship between the available scale margin and heating additions to remain unchanged would have resulted in the continuation of an increasingly anomalous situation. The Government therefore decided that it was reasonable to increase the margin to £1 and to apply it again to heating additions, which were originally within its scope.

In response to the hon. Member for Belfast, North in particular, I stress that no pensioner has suffered an overall reduction in income as a result of the change and that, for the first time, supplementary heating additions of £2·10 p.w. week are automatically payable to householders aged 65 to 70. Householders over 70 already qualify. Furthermore, the higher rate addition of £5·20 per week is now given to pensioners aged 85 or over.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman said that pensioners over 70 qualify automatically and that no pensioner has suffered a loss as a result of the change. I have written to the hon. Gentleman giving him details of a case were that has happened.

Mr. Patten: I shall look into that case and reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I can.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) mentioned rents. I am not sure whether it would be in order for me to dwell on that subject, but I think that the proposed increase of 4 per cent. for the coming year is not unreasonable. The hon. Gentleman referred to comparisons with the position in England, Wales and Scotland. I shall be delighted to give him the figures and, if necessary, to discuss the comparisons with him.

I assure the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster that there is no part of Northern Ireland in which the writ of the DHSS does not run. About 60 fraud investigation staff are doing sterling work throughout the Province, checking overtly and covertly on abuse and fraud. I shall be glad to supply the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members with figures of prosecutions, which are quite impressive. I have met members of the fraud investigations staff to pay my personal tribute to their work, which is often done in particularly difficult circumstances.

As hon. Members know, my remit in Northern Ireland Departments runs fairly wide, but I am sure that it is a relief to all concerned that it does not cover agriculture, though I have been called on to say a word or two on the subject from time to time. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) will confirm, I am all too conscious of my limitations in dealing with the subject.

I appreciate that hon. Members have serious worries about agriculture. Many have been expressed by the hon. Members for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), who is chairman of the Assembly Committee, for Mid-Ulster, for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) and for Newry and Armagh and by the right hon. Member for South Down, though he touched principally on some of the constitutional aspects.

I shall not deal with all the detailed points raised, because I prefer to mention three major issues. Naturally, I shall draw the attention of my noble Friend the Under-Secretary to the vigorous speeches made in the debate, and I know that he will respond to them as quickly as he can.

With reference to the payment of the milk levy, my hon. Friend the Minister of State quoted a written answer given today by the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I do not think that I can shed any further light on that. I gather from hon. Members that they thought that that had clarified the matter a little.

There is the question of the regional allocation of the milk quota, which I enjoyed debating with the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh on a memorable evening earlier this year. When my hon. Friend the Minister of State introduced the debate, he made it abundantly clear that he has great sympathy, as we all do, with Ulster milk producers. I should like to associate myself with those remarks. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland has received the full benefit of the 65,000 tonnes from the Community reserve, and an additional amount from the United Kingdom total. As a result, the percentage amount by which the Northern Ireland quota was less than 1983 deliveries will be no more than in other regions of the United Kingdom, although deliveries of milk in Northern Ireland have increased proportionately more between 1981

and 1983 than deliveries in England and Wales. My noble Friend is aware of the need to ensure that we again receive the 65,000 tonnes for 1985-86 in the price fixing round which is about to begin in Brussels.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster asked whether the reserve was sufficient to meet the needs of those producers. More than 3,800 farmers—almost half of all milk producers in Northern Ireland—submitted special case claims. The local panels have many cases remaining to be considered, including some from producers complaining against the Department's decision to reject cases which, in the Department's opinion, did not fulfil the criteria.

In addition, the tribunal received about 750 appeals from producers against provisional awards made by the local panels. Further appeals are expected. There is, therefore, some way to go before all cases are finalised. I cannot give a categoric response about the reserve question, as hon. Gentlemen understand. However, indications are that it will probably be necessary to scale down substantially the awards to these producers who have claimed secondary quotas and who meet development plans.

The subject of agriculture capital grants was also raised, especially by the hon. Members for Antrim, North and for Newry and Armagh. I appreciate that at first glance it must look strange and unfair that a province which provides only 6 per cent. of the United Kingdom's agriculture production should produce 33 per cent. of the cuts. However, that is not so surprising as a large proportion of any general reduction in grant rates was bound to fall on Northern Ireland, as more than one third of the United Kingdom's capital grant expenditure of this type is incurred in the Province. If a large share of the money goes to Northern Ireland, it is inevitable that a large share of the cuts will fall on the Province.

However, there is some good news for farmers. Because of the rather different needs in Northern Ireland—this touches on a point raised by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East—for a balance between conservation and agriculture, the Government have agreed that while grant rates for land reclamation will be reduced in the rest of the United Kingdom, they will not be reduced in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Member for South Down asked about the control of veterinary products in the Republic. The proper handling and control of veterinary medicines in the European Community is essential for human and animal health. I therefore accept that we should continue to ensure that all concerned are alive to the need for agreed Community-wide measures. I undertake to draw the attention of my noble Friend to the right hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Finally, the right hon. Member for South Down made a point, in a particularly engaging style, which he has made on previous occasions, and to which I have replied. I doubt whether he will find my reply on this occasion any more convincing than he has found it previously. The arrangements that were criticised by the right hon. Gentleman are not new. As he conceded, Northern Ireland has had separate legislation and a separate Consolidated Fund for more than 60 years. There is no secret or hidden reason why the Government persist with the arrangements. We believe that a devolved Government would best meet the special needs of Northern Ireland's divided community, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is encouraging the political parties to work out mutually acceptable arrangements to that end. The right hon. Gentleman has reservations about that policy, but the Government, with the support of Parliament, are seeking to do that. In that light, the financial and legislative arrangements for Northern Ireland are appropriate and sensible.

I hope that I have dealt with most of the main points raised during the debate. If not, I repeat that I shall respond by letter as soon as possible. I have only one task remaining, which is to commend the order to the House. I am only sorry that, once again, we shall not enjoy the company in the Division Lobby of the right hon. Member for South Down and his disapproving colleagues.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 8.

Division No. 56] **[11.22 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Michael
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bell, Stuart
Benyon, William
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hayward, Robert
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hind, Kenneth
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclean, David John
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Needham, Richard
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*

Rowe, Andrew	Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy	Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Sayeed, Jonathan	Wheeler, John
Skeet, T. H. H.	Wiggin, Jerry
Stanbrook, Ivor	
Steen, Anthony	Tellers for the Ayes:
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*	Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*	Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Beggs, Roy	Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*	Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
McCusker, Harold	
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James	Tellers for the Noes:
Nicholson, J.	Mr. William Ross and
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*	Mr. Ken Maginnis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (No. 3) (Northern Ireland) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

International Immunities and Privileges

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the draft Inter-American Development Bank (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.

That the draft International Lead and Zinc Study Group (Immunities and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.

That the draft EUTELSAT (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Question agreed to.

Social Security

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the draft Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Amendment and Temporary Provisions Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 22nd November, be approved. —*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Question agreed to.

Companies

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the draft Companies (Share Premium Account) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 22nd November, be approved.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Question agreed to.

House of Commons Members' Fund

11.32 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions etc Act 1984.

It will probably be convenient to discuss with it the second motion,

That in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st December 1984 as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,199 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £4,067 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £4,245 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £6,113 per annum whichever is the less:

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,101 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £2,969 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,118 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £3,986 per annum, whichever is the less:

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,101 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £2,969 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,118 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £3,986 per annum, whichever is the less:

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph *(b)* there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,282 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £641 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

The motions stand in my name and those of hon. Members on both sides of the House who share with me, as trustees, the responsibility of administering the House of Commons Members' Fund.

Right hon. and hon. Members enjoy today pension rights under the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund, but, as the House knows, this has not always been so. Our colleagues who left the House before 1964 have no pensions in respect of their service in the House, and many now live in considerably reduced and often straitened circumstances. This applies especially to former Members who are now of advanced years and, even more so, to many widows and widowers. The Members' Fund has existed since 1939 to provide assistance to former Members an their dependants, but the help which my fellow trustees and I are able to provide from the Members' Fund is modest in the extreme. We are deeply conscious of the need to improve their position and are giving urgent consideration to what steps might be taken to make this possible.

A further problem is that the needs of our former colleagues, and of widows or widowers, is not always known to us. I shall be most grateful, therefore, if hon. Members will let me know, as chairman of the trustees, of any case of which they become aware of a former Member or his or her dependants who are in need of help. I strongly urge any hon. Member who knows of a case of hardship to let us see if we can help.

In the meantime, we are now increasing the present levels of grants and payments which may be made under the Members' Fund legislation in line with recent increases approved for public service and national insurance retirement pensions. This is the purpose of the motions. I hope that they will receive the unanimous support of the House, for I can assure right hon. and hon. Members that the experience of the trustees has made us realise how much further provision is needed and also how very much it will be welcomed by those who will benefit.

I need not detain the House at length in moving the motions, since the provisions for which we seek approval are set out in detail in the motions on the Order Paper. Paragraph 1*(a)* sets out the new provisions for grants to ex-Members. At present, the Trustees are authorised to make grants to ex-Members of up to £2,091, provided that the total income of the applicant, including the grant, does not exceed £3,868. The grant is now raised to £2,199, and the income limit goes up to £4,067. To that is added the provision by which the trustees will be authorised to make larger payments, having due regard to length of service and need, of a grant of up to £4,245 provided that the income of the applicant, together with the grant, does not exceed £6,113.

Grants to widows are set out under paragraph *(b)*. At present the grant to a widow of an ex-Member is £1,047 provided that her income, including the grant, does not exceed £2,824. That grant is raised to £1,101 and the income limit goes to £2,969. There follows the provision by which, having regard to her husband's length of service, or to need, the trustees will be enabled to make grants of up to £2,118 provided that the widow's income with the grant does not exceed £3,986.

Grants to widowers are set out under paragraph (c). The provisions here are similar to those for widows under paragraph (b). In subparagraph (d) we refer to the "as of right" payments from the Members' Fund to former Members who had 10 years' service before October 1964, and to widows and widowers of such Members, provided for by the House of Commons Members' fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, which came into force on 19 March 1981. That provision seeks to increase the payments, at present at the rate of £1,218 per annum to former Members, to £1,282 per annum, and the payments to widows or widowers from £609 per annum to £641 per annum.

Those new provisions will all be retrospectively effective from 1 December 1984. They provide for increases of approximately 5·1 per cent. across the board, in line with the provisions contained in the Pensions Increase (Review) Order 1984. The additional expenditure arising is £7,200.

It is impossible on this occasion for us not to be reminded of the tragic loss of the late Member for Enfield, Southgate, who so cruelly lost his life two months ago. Sir Anthony Berry was appointed by this House as a trustee of the Members' fund in July last year and at once played a full and active part in all our work. He was most anxious to ensure that everything possible was done to help his former colleagues. He had a most genuine and humane concern for everyone who needed the help we could give. We honour his memory and shall sorely miss him.

11.37 pm

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on moving the motion. I am sure that the House will welcome the fact that the Committee in its wisdom has decided to look after the interests of former Members and their widows and widowers who find themselves in pecuniary circumstances not of their own making. I sincerely hope that the House will join with the right hon. Gentleman and pass the resolution unanimously.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions etc. Act 1984.

HOUSE OF COMMONS MEMBERS' FUND

Resolved,

That in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1st December 1984 as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,199 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £4,067 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the trustees think fit, they may make

[Mr. Albert McQuarrie]

a larger payment not exceeding £4,245 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £6,113 per annum whichever is the less:

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,101 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £2,969 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,118 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring her income up to £3,986 per annum, whichever is the less:

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,101 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £2,969 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,118 or such sum as, in the opinion of the trustees, will bring his income up to £3,986 per annum, whichever is the less:

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph *(b)* there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,282 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £641 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

—[Mr. Alfred Morris.]

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

11.39 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I beg to ask leave to present to the House a petition in the names of Ann Twomey of Wetheral and Mary Delap of Great Corby and on behalf of a further 157 of my constituents of Penrith and The Border. The petition is entitled,

"Petition for the Protection of the Human Embryo",

and my constituents are responding to the Government's invitation to comment on the report of the Warnock committee.

My petitioners

Welcome the Statement in the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology (the Warnock Report) that "the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation" and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law.

I entirely agree with that statement.

My petitioners go on to affirm that the newly fertilised human embryos are real individual human beings, and they therefore oppose all such practices as are recommended in the report which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity and right to life. They conclude:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned). And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

11.41 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to ask leave to present a petition which has been signed by some 720 of my constituents, mostly in the Shetland part of my constituency. I think that that number amounts to about 5 per cent. of the electorate of that part of my constituency. The terms of the petition for the protection of the human embryo are substantially those that have already been referred to by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean). The petition asks

that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

The petition concludes:

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray, etc.

Those who have signed the petition affirm, as I do, that the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle and that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law. I present the petition in that spirit of support.

To lie upon the Table.

11.42 pm

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I beg to ask leave to present three petitions from residents within the Banff and Buchan constituency. The first petition was initiated by Mrs. Marie Stephens of 39 Prince road, Peterhead, and contains 392 signatures. The second was initiated by the Reverend I. D. Zass-Ogilvie, rector of St.

Marnon's Scottish episcopal church in the village of Aberchirder. The third was initiated by Edith M. Smith of 22 Schoolhendry street, Portsoy, and contains 47 signatures.

All three petitions are couched in identical terms and affirm the petitioners' belief that the newly-fertilised human embryo is a real living individual human being. All three petitions also oppose all practices which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity and right to life.

The petitioners continue as follows:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

The three petitions conclude:

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

11.43 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I beg to ask leave to present a public petition for the protection of the human embryo, which stands in the name of Joan Johnson and is signed by more than 500 of my constituents from all parts of Norwich, North. I present it in a spirit of support.

To lie upon the Table.

11.44 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I have a petition to present in respect of 3,662 people in my constituency and surrounding areas that prays in the terms already mentioned tonight. I associate myself with the sentiments expressed in the petition collected by J. Fox. My constituents pray that

the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done soley for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

11.45 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I also beg to ask leave to present a petition in similar terms from the constituents of Leicester, East, which I have the honour to represent, and from all parts of the city of Leicester and the county of Leicestershire.

The petition contains the signatures of 976 people, including many from Leicestershire Life. It rightly draws attention to certain recommendations in the Warnock report, particularly in relation to the status of the embryo. The petition reads:

the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

I heartily endorse all the sentiments expressed in that petition, which has been supported throughout the county. The petition ends

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mental Health Commission Secretariat

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

11.46 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): I am indebted to Mr. Speaker for being given the opportunity to raise an issue which, although not earth-shattering, is of considerable importance following the passage of the Mental Health Act 1983 which set up the Mental Health Commission.

The Minister and I sat on the Committee that considered that measure. Various discussions, which are not connected with the work of the secretariat, took place, although much of what we determined in that Committee gave life to the secretariat.

The secretariat's main function is to protect the rights of formally detained psychiatric patients by investigating complaints by such patients and by visiting hospitals where they are detained.

The commissioners are either professionals associated with psychiatry or interested and involved lay people. Its organisation is split into three regions—the north-west, the north-east and the south. Each region is serviced by its own secretariat, with support staff, totalling only about 15.

My debate is about the proposed centralisation of that secretariat. Before dealing with that, I shall deal with a misleading answer given to me by the Minister. He said that commissioners do not receive fees. Different classes of commissioners exist. The retired, the self-employed and those employed by private organisations, in addition to their expenses, receive fees at a rate of a little more than £70 per day. The employers of those employed by public bodies other than the Health Service are remunerated for loss of their employees' time.

I regret that, unfairly, where commissioners are Health Service employees, neither their employers—the district health authorities—nor the commissioners receive any financial consideration for their loss of working time on commission business that may involve several days per week, evenings and even weekend work. NHS-employed commissioners must be struggling to maintain an adequate input to keep their jobs going. Their hard-pressed district health authorities, with their manpower targets and cash limits to meet, must regret releasing their staff without compensation.

Many of the staff are highly experienced and valuable. After all, presumably that is why they were appointed by the Secretary of State. Many of their jobs involve direct patient services. I suggest that the discrimination against the Health Service appointees is likely to present a powerful disincentive to health authorities supporting their employees' appointment to the commission and to such employees to accept appointments in future. I urge the Secretary of State to regularise the position of Health Service-employed commissioners at an early date.

The commission consists of part-time commissioners — some of whom are in an anomolous position in respect of fees-serviced by a full-time but small secretariat organised on a regional basis. It has been in existence for just over one year. As the Minister has acknowledged, its achievements are impressive, yet already it is proposed radically to alter its organisational structure. That was admitted by a DHSS Minister in answer to my recent parliamentary question.

[Mr. Stan Thorne]

The proposal is no longer to have separate secretariats in the three regions, but to centralise them in the south-east, in London. I maintain that one reason why the commission has been able to establish credibility so quickly is that it is decentralised and regionalised. Thus, in the north-west, the commission covers two special hospitals—Moss Side and Park Lane. Much of the work of the commission is very much concerned with those institutions.

The patients in the hospitals have been able to relate to a commission which, for them, is almost just down the road. More importantly, it stands a chance of being seen as independent of "them"—the DHSS and the Home Office in London.

The commissioners have been able to establish good working relationships with the present secretariat, so that, as has been acknowledged, a commission that is part-time and largely unpaid has become an efficient, practical and working body. Yet, already, it is proposed to destroy the working relationships and replace them with what will inevitably mean more faceless relationships with more anonymous civil servants in London.

From both points of view—that of the patients served by the commission, and the efficiency and good working relationship within the commission — the proposed change cannot make good sense, especially coming, as it does, so soon after the inception of the commission. More general considerations concern me as well. The proposal represents yet another, albeit small, example of the drift of jobs away from the north-west and north-east, for example, into the south-east and London. It seems to represent yet another imposition of a doctrinaire policy of centralisation against the wishes of those concerned.

I understand that of the two commission regions concerned, the commissioners in the north-west were unanimous in their objection to the proposed centralisation, as were many of the commissioners in the north-east.

Worse than this, a centralised secretariat of civil servants in central London, dealing sometimes with highly sensitive complaints involving the DHSS, starts to sound like the beginning of the end of the independence of the commission. I consider that independence—I thought that the Minister did too—to be essential. It will no doubt be seized upon by patients' rights groups, which will perceive this, rightly or wrongly, as the first nail in the coffin for a body for which they had high hopes.

I understand that the secretariat shares the same in-line management structures as the managers of special hospitals. Centralisation into London is bound to lead to concern, justified or otherwise, that the vital and necessary independence of the commission and its secretariat will be eroded within these management structures.

The Minister may wish to claim that the proposed centralisation is necessary on cost and efficiency grounds. I dispute that. The commission has a modest budget which should not be made so modest that it cannot carry out its functions. It has a small support staff. In the three regional secretariats there is a total staff of about 15, including typists, and they have the job of organising the part-time commissioners, who are scattered throughout the country, to visit every establishment where there are detained patients at least once a year, and once a month to special hospitals. They deal with many complaints and organise second opinions for compulsory treatments within days of the request coming from hospitals, including all the paperwork and documentation that must be involved. Against that background, a staff of 15 can be considered only as *minimal*.

As I understand it, the proposed reorganisation will do nothing to reduce the number of secretariat staff. The proposed centralisation will lead almost certainly to more expenditure on incidentals such as travelling, telephone and office rental costs. Given the nature of the work that I have outlined, it is difficult to see how greater efficiency can ensue.

Another claim that the Minister may wish to make in justification of the proposal is that the central policy committee within the commission has agreed to the proposal. Far from being a justification, I would submit that that agreement raises other concerns. I know that some of the commissioners are concerned about the work and role of the committee, which is appointed by the Secretary of State. They consider it to be out of touch with the regions, in that it has agreed with the proposal against the wishes of the regional commissions.

The proposal to centralise the secretariat has met with considerable opposition from commissioners. It will decrease markedly the credibility of the commissioners as an independent body seeking to protect the rights of formally detained patients. The proposal represents yet another centralising drift of jobs and influence from the regions to London.

The new commission has a difficult job, and our efforts must be directed towards supporting, not undermining, it. This country's recent record on human rights has been somewhat tarnished in the eyes of the rest of the developed world. We have set up a body to safeguard civil rights and guarantee minimum standards of care and treatment to a vulnerable section of our community which, sadly, until recently as a society we preferred to lock up as far away from us as possible and forget. We must not demean our advances by petty-minded and premature bureaucratic blinkering or efforts at minuscule financial savings.

I should like the Minister of Health to give the House certain assurances. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider his decision to centralise the commission's secretariat and instead follow the opinion of the majority of the commissioners affected and ensure adequately staffed regional secretariats? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not yet made a decision to centralise — I must admit that an earlier reply to a parliamentary question seemed to suggest that the final decision had not been taken—will he reject the advice of his civil servants, accept the unanimous view of the north-west commissioners and at least ensure an adequately staffed regional secretariat within the north-west? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman feels unable to depart from the concept of a centralised secretariat, will he consider carefully whether it must be centralised into London? I understand that there is more than adequate office space next to the offices of the north-west secretariat and within the same building to house the whole centralised secretariat. There seems little good reason—other than dogma — why London should always be chosen as the site for the centralised secretariat, when adequate and arguably more suitable accommodation exists elsewhere.

Could the Minister leave the north-west on its own if he is determined to centralise and take in the north-east with London? The right hon. and learned Gentleman will

be aware that the National Health Advisory Service consists of people who are seconded from their employing authority. Why cannot the same be done with the mental health commissioners? Whatever the decision the Minister eventually reaches, I hope that he can say that there will be no enforced redundancies among the staff of the existing secretariat.

12.3 am

The Minister for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I thank the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) for raising this matter on the Adjournment. As he said, the subject matter is hardly earth-shattering, but I agree with him about its importance. We served on the Standing Committee on the Bill which eventually became an Act and paved the way for the creation of the Mental Health Act Commission. During the Committee's proceedings we agreed on rather more occasions than we are accustomed to do when considering more general political issues in the House. We both share and support the broad objectives of the legislation and support the work of the new commission. We wish to defend its independence, which was a matter which the hon. Member mentioned. I am sure that we both congratulate it on its work so far.

Both of us are fairly defiantly provincial, which is an interest we share, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, the present secretariat is divided, with five people in London, four in Liverpool and four in Nottingham. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman speaks with an interest in Liverpool, but I represent part of the county of Nottingham and assure him that I have no innate desire to see the secretariat of this or any other body situated in central London if there are compelling reasons to the contrary.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman in supporting the work of the commission. It was established in 1983 under an order and regulations following the powers contained in the Mental Health Act 1983. Its work began on 30 September 1983. I am pleased to join in the tribute which, by implication, the hon. Member paid to the work of the chairman, my noble Friend Lord Colville, and his fellow commissioners, who have made impressive progress.

The principal purpose of the Act and the commission's work is to look after the interests of patients who are suffering from mental illness. The commission must protect the interests of those patients whose mental disorder takes such a serious form that they must, in their interests and for the protection of others, be compulsorily detained.

People in such a position suffer a double disadvantage. They suffer a serious mental disorder and they lose the freedom of movement, which is such a valued possession of all in a society such as ours. The law therefore has to make special provision to protect the interests of detained patients. The Act was intended to make radical changes to the law to bring it up to date and to add to the protection of patients.

The commission was set up to look after the legal and more general rights of those patients. It has four main functions. First, members of the commission pay regular visits to hospitals where patients are detained to monitor the standards of care and treatment provided and to ensure that the various requirements of the Act are being satisfied.

Secondly, the commission's members operate the statutory provisions relating to consent to treatment. In some limited circumstances, those provisions affect informal patients also. At the moment, the commission is interested mainly in the consent to treatment of detained patients. Some of the medical members of the commission undertake second-opinion visits in connection with consent to treatment. The commission also provides the doctors to carry out that work.

Thirdly, the commissioners receive and act on complaints or other representations made by or on behalf of detained patients. Fourthly, the members of the commission are preparing a draft code of practice which will contain guidance on compulsory admissions to hospitals or nursing homes and guidance on the treatment of patients suffering from mental disorder.

The purpose of the code of practice is to promote good practice generally throughout the service. After we have undertaken the required consultations, we shall table the code for Parliament to consider. That is a wide range of work, which the commission is undertaking with vigour and enthusiasm. The commissioners, in the first year of operation, as part of the regular visiting programme already have paid one or more visits to hospitals where there are detained patients throughout England and Wales. They are also dealing with a considerable number of complaints from patients and their friends and relatives.

The commission is a large body. It must be, to undertake all this work across the country. There are 90 members. By discipline, the largest group is doctors. The other main disciplines represented are nurses, social workers, psychologists and lawyers. There are also lay members, and one or two members with a special knowledge of mental health services. The members are drawn from all parts of England and Wales.

While individual members bring their experience and specialist knowledge to the commission's work, one of the impressive features of the first year's work is the way in which members have seen themselves as commissioners first and not as representatives of specialist interests. A strong corporate team spirit has been forged.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the fees paid to the commission's members and suggested that we were in some way making divisions between them according to classes and not dealing with them fairly. It is true that we pay some compensation for loss of earnings to those in private employment, and we also make arrangements to pay the travelling expenses of all commissioners. There are some special arrangements to pay for additional work done by doctors who give up parts of their practice to serve on the commission but do extra sessions to provide a service to patients in their localities. Otherwise, in drawing up the statement of compensation for members of the commission, we try to act fairly between them all.

I shall write to the hon. Gentleman setting out fully and clearly the precise arrangements, in order to try to answer his fears that we are being unfair as between one category and another. He was, however, particularly concerned about those who worked for health authorities and thought that we might be deterring the authorities as employers, or the employees themselves, by not providing either with compensation for loss of earnings.

We believed that, for those working for health authorities, work for the Mental Health Act Commission would be regarded as part of their ordinary service to the NHS. I have no evidence that anyone has been deterred, and I have no evidence that any health authority has discouraged any of its employees from serving on the commission. I hope that that has not happened, but I shall

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

look into the matter and give the hon. Gentleman a full letter. He can then respond if he feels that our arrangements are in some way unfair and discriminatory.

The hon. Gentleman's main concern is with the organisation of the commission. In drawing up the organisation we followed, but did not exactly match, the organisation of the parallel mental health review tribunals. They are slightly different bodies created under the Mental Health Act 1959. Their members are appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. They hear appeals against detention by detained patients, and have been working for many years.

The tribunals have found that a large proportion of their hearings arise from patients who are detained in the four special hospitals located in Berkshire, Nottinghamshire and near Liverpool. Because a significant proportion of all tribunal hearings take place at those hospitals, the secretariat offices of the mental health review tribunals are located in London, Nottingham and Liverpool, and from there the tribunals derive the secretarial support that they need.

I mention those because when the Mental Health Act Commission came into existence that pattern was to some extent followed. The commission divided the NHS regions in the country into three groups, one covering the southern half of the country, one the regions on the western side, from the west midlands northwards, and the third the eastern side, from Trent northwards. Each of these three territorial teams has its own chairman and vice-chairman, and organises its own programme of regular work under the various headings which I have described.

Essentially, my noble Friend Lord Colville of Culross is supported by a small central policy committee. When the organisation was first being set up, we rejected the suggestion that it should share the secretariat with the mental health review tribunals, because the two bodies have quite different functions and ought to have separate identities. However, we followed the pattern which I have described, which the tribunals had previously followed, and we now describe our areas within the Mental Health Act Commission as the southern, north-eastern and north-western regions of the commission.

There is a total of 15 staff in the commission's secretariat, all but one being seconded officers from my Department, and almost all of them serving with one of the three regional teams. All those staff have thrown themselves with great enthusiasm into the work of the commission, and their work has been much appreciated by the commissioners.

A little while ago it was decided that as it was now 12 months since the new Act was introduced, and it was time for the Department's staff inspectors to examine the work of the secretariat staff of both the mental health review tribunals and the Mental Health Act Commission. We use staff inspectors regularly inside our Department, just as we do inside every Department of central Government. It is a well-established procedure for looking at the distribution of the work load and making sure that organisational questions are addressed in a way which ensures that work is undertaken in the most efficient and economical manner.

The inspectors in this case interviewed individual staff members and looked at the replies to standard questionaires. After discussion of a draft report with local management, they drew up a final report with their recommendations. It was those staff inspectors who recommended the centralisation of the services.

In due course I can provide the hon. Gentleman with a list of the eight reasons which led the inspectors to recommend the centralisation of the secretariat. They were first drawn in by a request from the regions for more staff, because various problems had arisen in organising the work properly with such comparatively small numbers in each of the centres. It was very difficult to cover for staff absence, holidays or sudden surges of work. It was found that that difficulty had been overcome by a rather heavy use of casual labour. No fewer than 42 man weeks of casual labour had been used in the period 1 October 1983 to 30 June 1984. Therefore, the recommendation was that greater efficiency of operation could be achieved if all staff were located at the London headquarters office of the commission.

I listened to what the hon. Gentleman said. No final decision has been taken, although the central committee, despite some misgivings on the part of some members, has supported the recommendation. I shall put the points made by the hon. Gentleman to my noble Friend Lord Colville of Culross and will look into the matter again to see whether the commission is really satisfied that it needs to centralise its staff. We do not want more staff, but we do want efficient organisation. We do not want unnecessarily to increase costs. We are both agreed that we want to support the work of the commission. There is no point in centralising it if that is not useful to the commission. Therefore, I promise the hon. Member that I shall take his points on board and come back to him in due course with a considered response. I shall hope to amplify the reasons for centralisation if that goes ahead or to come back to the hon. Gentleman with the reasons for its reconsideration if my noble Friend considers that, on balance, this matter is worth reopening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

GCHQ Cheltenham

1. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with the International Labour Organisation about the withdrawal of trade union rights at Government Communications Headquarters.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): The International Labour Organisation has written in connection with the report on GCHQ by the Committee on Freedom of Association. The Government will be responding to this report within the next few weeks.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the Secretary of State explain to the ILO why, if there was a real, serious threat to national security, the Government took no action for three long years after the events of which they complain? How could competent Ministers allow themselves to be involved in such dereliction of duty?

Mr. King: I see that the hon. Gentleman recognises that there is a case for taking action because of the deliberate campaign to damage defence readiness, which was part of the Civil Service dispute. I believe that the time scale shows the lengths to which the Government went to see whether alternative routes were available.

Mr. Budgen: When the Government said at the beginning of the dispute that they would be bound by the domestic legal process, did they mean that they would not accept the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in this matter?

Mr. King: The question of being bound by the domestic legal process had relevance to the request from the trade unions for a stay of any further action with regard to the employees affected at GCHQ.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will the Secretary of State therefore give an assurance that national security will not be used as a pretext for banning trade unions in other Government Departments?

Mr. King: I think that that assurance has been given very clearly indeed throughout the main generality of the Civil Service. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the specific provision of convention 151, that

"employees whose duties are of a highly confidential nature should be determined by national laws and regulations."

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets bodies, such as the ILO, will he point out that GCHQ is unique in that a vital part of its work is carried out within our intelligence framework, that the individuals working there understand and have always understood that and that that is why they never took action in the past? Is he aware that when I represented them 20 years ago they would not even have considered such action?

Mr. King: Yes, but the Opposition never seem to accept that. They fail to recognise that it was the boast of the Civil Service unions during the campaign, to quote an actual campaign document, that

"The use of selective strike action by members in sensitive areas is a key part of our campaign. Our ultimate success depends upon the extent to which . . . defence readiness is hampered."

Mr. Prescott: Is the Secretary of State aware that ballots can still take place at GCHQ, that in a recent ballot an individual was elected by 89 per cent. of the participants to represent them in pay negotiations, that that is a far greater proportion than the 85 per cent. required for a closed shop, but that the individual has nevertheless been forced to resign? Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to continue to encourage management to conduct ballots until it finds someone acceptable to it and to the Secretary of State?

Mr. King: The internal affairs of GCHQ are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I suspect, however, that it would be interesting to know exactly who were the participants in that ballot.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I beg to give notice that I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment at the earliest opportunity.

Adult Training

2. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of adult job retraining places within the Greater London council area.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Peter Morrison): We plan to train approaching 12,000 people this year in Greater London through the training opportunities scheme. In 1985-86 we expect to support nearly 17,000 adult training places in Greater London.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that the reply that I recently received from his Department made it clear that there are well over 65,000 men and women over the age of 50 who are unemployed in London? As many of them still have commitments — their children may be at school, or they may be buying their house—they have little hope of taking up a place on an adult retraining scheme. At this Christmas season, what message of hope can the Minister offer to those people? In particular, what can he tell them about their future employment prospects?

Mr. Morrison: I am aware of what the hon. Gentleman says about unemployment in Greater London. However, the numbers to be trained next year will substantially increase because of the rejigging of the adult training strategy. Some £75 million will be spent through the Manpower Services Commission on training and retraining in London.

Dr. Twinn: How many training places are provided in Greater London through the Greater London Training Board, as opposed to the Manpower Services Commission?

Mr. Morrison: The Greater London Training Board, by way of topping up the work of the MSC, has spent £7 million this year, compared with expenditure of £75 million by the MSC.

Industrial Relations

3. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the long-term improvement of industrial relations.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Peter Bottomley): The long-term improvement of industrial relations is an important topic of discussion in our frequent contacts with representatives of the CBI.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that greater employee participation has an important part to play in the long-term improvement of industrial relations, and will he emphasise the importance and urgency of the matter when he next meets the CBI?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir. Employee involvement and participation and the spread of share ownership help to persuade people to work together for the prosperity of the country and the security of their own jobs.

Mr. James Lamond: How can there be any improvement in industrial relations when the Government spend all their time bashing the trade union movement, legislating against it and trying to destroy it? How can such a Government turn round and make mealy-mouthed statements about their interest in good industrial relations?

Mr. Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman believes that spreading democracy within the trade unions amounts to bashing them, he takes a different view from that taken by most people and members of trade unions.

Youth Training Scheme

4. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for the numbers of people entering the youth training scheme and finding a job immediately in the Manpower Services Commission area serving Basildon; and how these figures compare *(a)* with the national figures and *(b)* with the local and national figures one year ago.

Mr. Peter Morrison: An informal survey of managing agents and sponsors in Essex shows that, to the best of their knowledge, more than seven out of 10 youngsters leaving the youth training scheme are going into jobs. A recent national sample survey indicated that almost six out of 10 leavers were in work at the time of the survey.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that the success rate in Basildon is even higher, and is he encouraged by that fact? Does he agree that the youth training scheme offers excellent training and every prospect of a permanent job at the end of a placement?

Mr. Morrison: I agree that Basildon has done particularly well and that, whatever Opposition Members may think, the youth training scheme is successful in every possible way. That success is demonstrated particularly clearly by the fact that the youngsters themselves approve of and like it.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister assure the young people of Basildon, Bradford, and many other places, that he has no proposal to deny them supplementary benefit if, for whatever reason, they refuse a youth training scheme place?

Mr. Morrison: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, I have seen some of the schemes in Bradford, and they too, are very successful.

In June 1982 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry — then Secretary of State for Employment — in a statement about supplementary benefit, said:

"We have therefore decided that withdrawal of supplementary benefit will not take place in September 1983 and that there will be a further review after a year's operation of the scheme."—[*Official Report*, 21 June 1982; Vol. 26, c. 23.]

Mr. Prescott: Can the Minister confirm that youngsters aged 16 will face a fine of £17·30 a week if they refuse a place on the youth training scheme? Many young people, who see the scheme as cheap labour, prefer to take the advice to get on their bikes and look for jobs. Should not the Minister consider the advice of the Select Committee to use whatever spare places are available to provide such opportunities for the 1 million young people under the age of 25? Is it not strange that a Government who believe in freedom of choice should be recruiting young people into forced labour schemes?

Mr. Morrison: I can confirm that, apparantly unlike the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends, the Government are working towards unemployment for 16 and 17-year-olds not being an option. I can also confirm that, for 18 to 24-year-olds, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that of the 130,000 community programme places, 50,000 would have training. More than half of the places on the community programme are occupied by 18 to 24-year-olds.

Young Workers Scheme

5. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are employed under the young workers scheme in firms which come under the Distributive Trades Wages Council.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Alan Clark): The Retail Trade (Non Food) Wages Council has chosen to set a weekly minimum rate of pay for 17-year-olds which, by just 5p, is too high to enable employers in that trade to claim support under the young workers scheme.

Mr. Townend: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is nonsense for the Government to set aside funds to encourage employers to take on young people at realistic rates of pay when wages councils make any employer who takes advantage of that scheme in breach of the regulations? How many young people are on the dole because of this stupidity, and when will the Government act?

Mr. Clark: As my hon. Friend knows, we are examining wages councils. We encourage representations

from all quarters, including his, which, though not unpredictable, is welcome. The fixing of a limit which is so narrowly calculated to frustrate the working of a Government scheme is unlikely to be accidental.

Mr. Nellist: Perhaps for the information of the House and others who are listening the Minister will say how much the wages council rate is in pounds and pence. Will he confirm that when Sir John Hoskyns, who I believe now has something to do with the Institute of Directors, was the head of a policy unit under the Prime Minister, he produced a paper which said that the aim of the young workers scheme and the youth training scheme was to increase the differential between adult rates and young workers' rates — in other words, to create a pool of cheap youth labour?

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is waxing very indignant about wage rates, but he must decide to which he attaches the greater importance: the wage rates of those who are in work, or to the job prospects of those who are seeking work.

Young Persons

6. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of young people aged 16 to 24 years, not currently in full-time education, are without full-time, permanent employment at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The labour force survey a year ago showed that the approximate percentages were: 46 in full-time employment, seven in other employment, making 53 in all; 20 in full-time education, three in training and employment schemes, making 23; 10 were not seeking work, including those looking after a home or family; and 13 were unemployed seeking work.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Does he understand what a personal tragedy it is for the third of a million young people who have been out of work for more than one year? Does he appreciate that if the Government intend to bully young school leavers on to youth training schemes there will be massive and widespread opposition? Will he give an assurance that he will undertake realistic and widespread consultations with people who are involved in YTS before the Government take a decision? Will he also undertake, in view of the gravity of the Government's proposals, to arrange for a debate on the Floor of the House before such a scheme is implemented?

Mr. Bottomley: The Gentleman will have heard what my hon. Friend the Minister of State has said, and the hon. Gentleman's final question should be addressed to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I can say, however, that it is common ground that we must build up the quality of training, encourage people to take that training and ensure that all school leavers get the best possible opportunities to meet the needs for jobs in the future and to create the prosperity on which our future depends.

Mr. Madel: If there are to be more courses on computer skills and similar subjects in further education, which means local authorities being involved in more expenditure, will the Government take care to ensure that expenditure which is designed to help young unemployed people will not push local authorities into penalty zones with regard to the rate support grant?

Mr. Bottomley: I hesitate to answer on behalf of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for the Environment. I believe that my hon. Friend will recognise that much of what he has been pushing for has led to greater attention being paid to technical and vocational education in and out of school.

Mr. Wigley: Yesterday the Prime Minister said that every 16, 17 and 18-year-old had an opportunity to go into either training or further education. Does the Under-Secretary of State agree that that is not a real option when many young people going into further education receive a grant of only £200 a year, which, in effect, debars them from obtaining that education?

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is encouraging us to do more and to do better. We shall certainly take on board his remarks.

Mr. Maples: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of helping to create jobs for the young unemployed and others who are unemployed is to reduce employers' national insurance contributions? That would be a more effective way of helping to create jobs than raising tax thresholds.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right, but we need to recognise that employers take part in wage bargaining, and at present wage rates are rising faster than the growth in output or productivity.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that, as many young people are out of work for so long, long-term unemployment is becoming a social cancer? Will the hon. Gentleman ensure that the re-employment of the long-term unemployed is a top Government priority and that the level of long-term unemployment is the main criterion for Government aid?

Mr. Bottomley: There is agreement on both sides of the House that trying to create opportunities for the long-term unemployed, whether young or old, to return to employment is a high priority. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's support.

Skillcentres

7. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received recently on the closure of skillcentres.

Mr. Tom King: Since my statement in the House about the skillcentre proposals being made to the Manpower Services Commission by the Skillcentre Training Agency, my colleagues and I have received some 50 letters on the subject.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Secretary of State aware that throughout the country numerous firms have declared their opposition to the closure of skillcentres, which provide the up-to-date and relevant skills for their industries? I have received letters on this matter from Taylor Woodrow and Lonhro and from the sunrise and sunset industries, if one must use that terminology. Will the right hon. Gentleman instruct the MSC to consult all bodies — not only employers, but trade unions and education authorities — before any of these closures are brought forward?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the officials in the MSC and the Skillcentre Training Agency gave evidence to the Select Committee and agreed to defer making any decision at their last meeting on this subject. I understand that the Select Committee will hold a further meeting with the Civil Service unions concerned in this matter. I know that the MSC will be anxious to hear the views of anyone who wishes to comment on these proposals.

Mr. Jessel: Will my right hon. Friend reconsider whether the Twickenham skillcentre, which he visited last year and which he knows does excellent work, can be saved? Failing that, will he ascertain what other openings within easy reach of the area can be offered to staff and trainees?

Mr. King: I know that my hon. Friend was extremely prompt in expressing his interest in the skillcentre in his constituency and that he sent one of the letters that we received on the subject. I know also that he has spoken to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. We shall certainly consider the points that he has made.

Mr. Corbett: How will the proposed closure of the skillcentre at Castle Bromwich help people to acquire the skills they need to obtain a reasonable chance of getting a job?

Mr. King: If the hon. Gentleman has a chance to look at the proposals, he will note that they will establish a wider range of adult training and ensure that we provide more opportunities. The figures for the midlands show that there will be an increase of 157 per cent. in the number of people who will be able to receive adult training under the new proposals. That is on the basis of the proposals made by the Skillcentre Training Agency.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the devil makes work for idle hands, and that all useful training must be beneficial?

Mr. King: The answer to the first part of my hon. Friend's question is yes.

With regard to the second part, we are most anxious to ensure that training provision is relevant and appropriate and covers as many people as possible and that resources are available to give people the best possible chance of getting into jobs.

Youth Training Scheme

8. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish figures showing the number of trainees with special education or special training needs currently training within the youth training scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: These figures are not available, as youngsters with special education or special training needs are not separately categorised. However, all youngsters who are eligible for the youth training scheme are offered training designed to meet their individual needs.

Mr. Ashdown: As the Education Act 1981 requires that special educational needs should be met, does the Minister believe that those figures should be kept to ensure that the Act is being followed? Does he realise that in present circumstances the buck is being passed between the MSC and the local education authority as to who should provide for those needs, in such a way, for instance, that in Yeovil only 2 per cent. of the estimated 20 per cent. are receiving the special education required?

Mr. Morrison: As I said to the hon. Gentleman the other day, if there are cases that he wishes to bring to my attention, I shall look at them. There are a variety of different schemes under modes A and B. They are tailored to help all youngsters, whatever their needs may be.

Mr. Lawler: I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that most young people regard YTS as a worthwhile scheme which will help them to secure permanent employment in the future. What proportion of relevant school leavers this year have gained YTS places, and how many are left to fulfil the pledge that all eligible youngsters will receive a place before Christmas?

Mr. Morrison: On the latter point, I can assure my hon. Friend that we are confident that the Christmas undertaking in respect of minimum age school leavers will be kept. What is gratifying at this stage is that the number of youngsters joining the scheme is substantially up compared with last year. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for what he does to help the scheme along.

Mr. Eastham: Is it not a fact that mode A is run privately by the employers, who make virtually no provision for handicapped people, while mode B is, in the main, provided by local authorities? The Government cut mode B last year, which will be to the detriment of handicapped students.

Mr. Morrison: I am not sure from what facts and figures the hon. Gentleman is talking. There are a substantial number of disabled youngsters on mode A schemes. On mode B, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is a waste of taxpayers' money to have schemes open but not filled at a cost of £2,000 per approved place. That is not what either of us wants.

Job Sharing Scheme

9. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what progress he has made in encouraging job sharing and job splitting.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend announced in the debate on the Address that he would be improving two experimental Government initiatives, namely, the job splitting scheme and the part-time job release scheme, designed to encourage changes in working patterns and to help in reducing the problem of unemployment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Has my hon. Friend considered using reductions in national insurance contributions to encourage job sharing? Does he agree that in larger businesses that would permit more people to be employed, and that the net cost to the Government would be small?

Mr. Clark: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the starting point for national insurance contributions is £34 a week, which means that such contributions are not required for many part-time jobs. We are worried about the legislative burden, including national insurance contributions, on employers which might hinder the creation of new jobs. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's comments are borne in mind by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Golding: Is the Minister aware that only 990 places have been created by the job splitting scheme? Is he further aware that in March 1983 the Government justified spending on 338,000 places by saying that there had been 9,000 inquiries? What has happened to those inquiries?

Mr. Clark: I believe that the hon. Gentleman meant £338,000. He said places.

Mr. Golding: No.

Mr. Clark: I admit that the result of the job splitting scheme has been disappointing, which is why my right hon. Friend announced improvements to it. Naturally, it was appropriate to have an advertising campaign of a limited nature in the first instance, to draw the attention to the scheme of those who might be interested in it.

Mr. Rowe: Is it not an undesirable paradox that at a time when many people are unemployed many of the most prosperous people in society appear to be working longer hours than ever before? Will my hon. Friend consider having discussions with professional bodies and others to see what progress can be made in sharing some of the work among people whose take-home pay is such that it would be easier for them to do so than it would be for people lower down the pay scale?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend's suggestion is interesting. Essentially, wage rates and hours of work should be negotiated between employer and employee.

Mr. Evans: Will the Minister concede that, despite the thousands of pounds spent on advertising the job-splitting scheme, it is a dismal failure? Why does he not spend the money more wisely and extend the provisions of the job release scheme to 62-year-olds, among whom there is an obvious demand for this popular scheme?

Mr. Clark: I note the hon. Gentleman's characteristic lack of generosity, which he always displays in relation to this scheme, and I applaud his concern for the public borrowing requirement.

Labour Statistics

10. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed in Lambeth for more than six months.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 11 October, the latest date for which the figures are available, there were 13,162 claimants who had been unemployed for more than six months in the area covered by the Brixton, Stockwell, Streatham and West Norwood jobcentres, which corresponds closely to the London borough of Lambeth.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Minister realise that that is a catastrophic figure and comprises more than half of the unemployed in Lambeth? Is he aware that long-term unemployment is a disease that eats at the heart of that community? Why have the Government chosen this moment to close a skillcentre in Lambeth, to create redundancies by rate capping in three local authorities and to cut the housing programme? Have they taken leave of their senses?

Mr. Bottomley: On 23 November the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to make his speech and to listen to the reply from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment. He will agree that if Lambeth has managed to double its rates per job in the past two years, it is time that rate capping was introduced to give employment in Lambeth, which is rising, a chance.

Mr. Marlow: Why is it that loony Left-wing authorities and high unemployment go together? Which is the chicken and which is the egg?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend hints at the serious point that if Lambeth and other local authorities in London want more employment they should pay more attention to the needs of employers and those who need jobs, and less to party politics that seem to be paid for by the rates.

Youth Training Scheme

11. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what improvements he proposes to introduce into the youth training scheme to make it more relevant to today's training needs.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We shall continue our efforts to ensure the youth training scheme provides quality training and responds flexibly to industry's needs.

Mr. King: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that many Conservative Members would welcome a youth training scheme which was extended to all school leavers and was based on an increasing use of apprenticeships?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend will appreciate that we are considering that now. I agree that there should be a flow through from the scheme into apprenticeships based on standards and not on time-serving.

Mr. Penhaligon: Does the Minister agree that if the YTS is to develop into the fully grown plant, as Conservative Members frequently describe it, it must be seen to be attractive and relevant to our young people, and not as a punishment for failing to find a job, which will happen if attendance is made compulsory?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have seen schemes in his constituency which are attractive and relevant. In my opinion Cornwall does particularly well. Regarding his other point, he has already heard what I have to say.

Mr. Alexander: Does my hon. Friend recollect that in the early days the YTS was ridiculed by Opposition Members and others as being useless for providing future jobs for young people? Does he agree that the record of the YTS has totally vindicated the claims made for it?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with my hon. Friend in all but one respect. I regret that some Opposition Members still try to ridicule the scheme. That does no good to the youngsters who are not part of it. It must be better to have a scheme of work experience than to have none.

Ms. Clare Short: Why, if the YTS is so popular, is the Minister proposing to make it compulsory? Will he admit that the real reason is that he wants to reduce the minimum level of supplementary benefit above which the YTS allowance operates, so that the allowance can be reduced to a level even lower than the present one?

Mr. Morrison: I do not know why the hon. Lady uses the word "compulsory". I have always maintained, and will maintain, that the YTS is voluntary.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend accept that the proposal that school leavers who do not wish to take a place on the YTS should not be entitled to supplementary benefit is welcome to many Conservative Members? Is it not remarkable that Opposition Members would far rather that a youngster started his working life on the dole than have a scheme of training that would equip him for a working life?

Mr. Morrison: It is remarkable that Opposition Members believe that it is better for youngsters to go on the dole when they have the opportunity to go on a training scheme.

Mr. Sheerman: Is it not true that what youngsters want most are jobs? They want a decent start in life. Will the Minister stop being mealy-mouthed and fudging this issue? Does he believe that supplementary benefit should be withdrawn from those who choose not to go on youth training schemes? Is that Government policy? Does he realise that at the stage when the youth training scheme could begin to become a much better quality scheme it will be undermind completely by those proposals? Finally, does he understand that he will place a stigma on youth training from which it will never recover?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman heard what I said about supplementary benefit. He must accept that relevant training is necessary to find jobs. That is precisely what the youngsters on YTS received last year, and are getting this year.

Trade Unions (Postal Ballots)

12. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many trades unions have applied for public money to cover the cost of postal ballots under the provisions of the Employment Act 1980.

Mr. Tom King: I am informed by the certification officer that 26 trade unions have applied for public money under the provisions of the Employment Act 1980 towards the cost incurred in holding secret postal ballots.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. Friend derive encouragement from those figures, or does he believe that they show that there is no need to provide public money to encourage trade unions to carry out ballots?

Mr. King: One can draw some encouragement from the fact that, after an unpromising start, there is clear evidence that several trade unions understand the opportunities that exist in the legislation. I said that 26 unions had applied for public funds to hold secret ballots, and I understand that more major unions may follow that course, which will mean better opportunities for democratic choice for their members.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Secretary of State accept that it is nothing short of hypocrisy for the Government to tell trade unions that they should have postal ballots, when on 30 September the Government, under the guidance of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, told a group of business men to get together at the Bank of England to save Johnson Matthey bankers, at the same time as they are closing uneconomic pits——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I gave the hon. Gentleman the opportunity to ask a question about postal ballots, not about Johnson Matthey.

Mr. Skinner: Is there not one law for the City, which does not need postal ballots to use taxpayers' money, and another one for the trade unions, which are told by the Government to have secret ballots?

Mr. King: I hope that that made the hon. Gentleman feel good, but it did not have much to do with the question.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Is it not particularly to be welcomed that postal ballots are to be used by so many trade unions? Does this not show that trade unions are finally becoming democratic and truly wish to reflect the views of all their members and not just those of some of their Left-wing executive members?

Mr. King: Hon. Members will have seen the further statements from a number of trade unions, and one can take encouragement from the fact that, increasingly, trade unions are bringing their procedures into line with the legislation that we have passed, which I hope will be helpful and in the interests not only of their members but of better and more orderly conduct of industrial relations.

Mr. Ashton: How can the Government try to compel trade unions to ballot their members when the Government do not ballot their Back Benchers on measures such as the recent students grants measure?

Mr. King: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is opposed to ballots of trade union members——

Mr. Ashton: No.

Mr. King: I am glad to see then that he supports our proposals and that that view is spreading to the Labour Benches.

Wages Councils (Inspections)

13. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspections by the wages councils have taken place in the last 12 months; and how many prosecutions there have been as a result of such inspections.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the 12 months ending 31 October, the Wages Inspectorate checked the pay of workers at 43,079 establishments. One of the employers was prosecuted.

Mr. Dixon: Is it not a disgrace that all these inspections resulted in the prosecution of only one employer of the many who are robbing the lowest paid, while in the miners' strike hundreds of miners are arrested, handcuffed and put into gaol, simply for standing on the pavement, or simply for shouting "scabs"?

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will realise that the level of prosecution is roughly the same as in the early years of the last Labour Government. I prefer to leave the rest of his question to a different debate.

Mr. Fallon: Does my hon. Friend know that the arrears paid in wages as a result of these visits was £1·8 million, whereas the Wages Inspectorate costs £3 million to run? Would it not be better if, instead of fussing about regulating wages and conditions, we allowed young people in the north to price themselves into work?

Mr. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are considering the future of the wages councils system. The point about young people will be

taken on board, but even my hon. Friend will recognise that not every young person in every region will get a job, at whatever level of wages.

Dr. McDonald: Why are the Government so keen to listen to their hon. Friends who suggest that they should abolish the wages councils on the pretence that this would greatly increase the number of jobs available, particularly for young people? Is the Minister not aware that even if the wages councils were abolished, at best only 8,000 more jobs would be created—a tiny proportion of the number of jobs needed to deal with the 3 million unemployed?

Mr. Bottomley: I fear that the hon. Lady was not listening to my other answers. The position of young people now is rather different from what it was 10 years ago, and the rise in the relative wages of young people has been associated with a reduction in job opportunities for them.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

14. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs are estimated to be created for each entrant to the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: In addition to the 60,000 people directly assisted by the enterprise allowance scheme to set up their own businesses, we estimate that about 25,000 additional jobs have been created by those businesses so far.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the many Labour detractors, this scheme has been highly successful and has greatly benefited many of my constituents and created jobs in my constituency? Is it not an extremely economical way to create jobs, unlike many of the hare-brained schemes proposed by the Labour party?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is entirely right, although I do not think, to do them justice, that Labour Members criticised the scheme, which is welcomed by the House as extremely effective. Its most obvious merit is that it survives after the grant has ceased and generates additional jobs on top of jobs for those who apply successfully.

Mr. Dobson: Why do Ministers take the view that for the rich it is an incentive to get more money while for the people working in wages councils industries it will be an incentive for them to get less?

Mr. Clark: I do not wish to prevent the hon. Member from offering philosophical reflections, but the enterprise allowance is only £40 a week.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my hon. Friend confirm publicly what the Minister of State told me in a letter today namely that those who are not in receipt of unemployment benefit or supplementary benefit, but who are in receipt of a war disability pension, will now qualify for enterprise allowance?

Mr. Clark: I would not choose this occasion to disagree with my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is paying an official visit to the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Hamilton: Will the right hon. Gentleman inform the Prime Minister, when she returns, of the great anger on both sides of the House and outside at the imposition of VAT on each record sold in aid of the Ethiopian disaster fund? Is the Prime Minister aware that it is estimated that £500,000 has been raised by that record? Will the right hon. Lady recognise this as a one-off appeal? Bearing in mind that the Government changed their minds about student grants, cannot they change their minds on this?

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate the motivation of those involved in the records production. I fully appreciate that many hon. Members on all sides are disappointed that the Government cannot find some discriminatory fiscal arrangement for the sales of the record, but in their stand the Government are following the tradition of successive Governments. The real test is to set that decision against the amount of money spent on aid by this regime.

Mr. W. Benyon: Will my right hon. Friend draw the Prime Minister's attention to the trial in Northern Ireland last week of private Thain of the Light Infantry? Will he tell the Prime Minister how deeply disturbed many of us are at the sentence imposed in the dangerous conditions applying in Northern Ireland? Has not the time come for a radical review of the working of the yellow card?

Mr. Biffen: I shall, of course, carry out my hon. Friend's request.

Mr. Steel: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the Prime Minister when she returns that one of the reasons for the Government's drop in popularity at the Enfield, Southgate by-election, and in opinion polls, is that on a range of matters the Government are completely out of touch with the public's mood? Does he understand that that applies particularly to the relatively simple case of imposing VAT on the Christmas record made to benefit Ethiopia? Why does the Chancellor refuse even to see an all-party delegation on that subject?

Mr. Biffen: The physical embodiment of the success at Enfield, Southgate will soon be at this Table. The right hon. Gentleman has to live with the bitter harvest of not very near misses.

Mr. Penhaligon: We would have the right hon. Gentleman on that swing.

Mr. Biffen: I should be more than delighted to have the hon. Gentleman's posse campaigning for me in Shropshire, North. I can think of no better counter-production than that.

The case for the record causes genuine sentiments of charity and compassion for the Ethiopian famine. However, the Government are following their well-proven record of not making discriminatory gestures. The real test

of our policies can be measured by the £35 million that we are giving to Ethiopia and by the £5½ million to £6 million to the Sudan.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that county councils and all those engaged in the welfare of former prisoners are instructed by the provision of clear guidelines so that there is no repetition of the appalling tragedy that took place concerning the sex pervert who killed four-year-old Marie Payne? Will he ensure that clear guidelines result in proper social welfare for ex-prisoners so that children are not put into such tragic danger?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises a matter which I know will cause the gravest disquiet within the House and outside. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will pay particular attention to his point about vetting and investigation.

Q2. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Did not the Government completely misread the feeling in the country and, I believe, in the House over VAT being imposed on the Band Aid single by sheltering behind bureaucratic traditions? Is there not a feeling throughout the country that in this instance the expression of concern for Ethiopia should be recognised and that the Government should not be the sole beneficiary of VAT revenue from this record?

Mr. Biffen: I do not think that I can helpfully add to what I have already said.

Mr. Lawrence: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the entire House will welcome the visit to Britain of Mr. Gorbachev and the Russian delegation? Is he aware that they are here to engender a feeling of trust, which we all welcome? Does he agree that the best way in which they can engender that feeling is to show that they are trustworthy in their undertaking to abide by the Helsinki agreement and their undertakings on human rights? If they give us the trust that will enable us to believe that they will honour those commitments, it will be so much easier for us to believe their promises on peace and security.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend speaks for the whole House when he talks of the welcome that there is for the visit of Mr. Gorbachev and the Russian delegation. I agree with him that the real hope lies in the development of trust, which is a patient plant which is nurtured by long and quiet negotiations rather than in a hothouse of propaganda. He is right in saying that the way in which it is monitored, both in the House and by the British public outside, is the extent to which human rights are upheld.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Prime Minister said yesterday evening that the Government can give training to every young person up to the age of 18 years—"and we know that we can do that" — did she mean that the Government will provide two years of training for all those who leave school at 16?

Mr. Biffen: The answer depends very much on the outcome of the investigation that is now being undertaken by the committee under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Lord Privy Seal join me in regretting that the Prime Minister appears to have raised false hopes in what she said yesterday before she went off on her visit? May I prevail upon the right hon. Gentleman to urge upon the Prime Minister, when she returns, to recognise that an extension of training to two years—universally—would be very welcome, especially if such a training programme ensured training of high quality, permitted satisfactory education provision, leading, if necessary and where appropriate, to qualifications, ensured adequate pay and led to a job? Lastly, and importantly, the right hon. Lady should ensure that such a scheme is not compulsory or takes the form of conscription or coercian by the withdrawal of benefits to make young people destitute.

Mr. Biffen: The remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday were some sound and robust observations that were legitimate and consistent with consideration of an issue that is under discussion by a committee. Of course I shall convey to my right hon. Friend that the right hon. Gentleman is now a convert to the Government's policy and their highly successful youth training scheme. The scheme is at the centre of the Government's policy against unemployment for the young and its growing success will be a part of our fortune.

Q3. **Mr. Maples** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Maples: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to congratulate the England cricket team on coming back from the dead so spectacularly, and will he join me in expressing the hope that the Opposition do not discover how to pull off the same trick?

Mr. Biffen: I should be happy to comply with both parts of that request.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Leader of the House convey to the Prime Minister the situation facing the unemployed in my constituency, which covers Leeds and Wakefield metropolitan district areas? Will he inform the Prime Minister that, over the past five years, eight collieries have closed in the West Yorkshire county council area and that the plight of the unemployed, particularly miners, is serious? Will he advise the right hon. Lady to do something about bringing in some resources to reduce unemployment in west Yorkshire?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall pass on that message, but I must say to the hon. Gentleman that a campaign to bring about greater employment must be run throughout the United Kingdom, not merely in one selected region or another. In that context, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take comfort, as I do, from the fact that 250,000 people are at work today who were not at work a year ago.

Q4. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fallon: Does my right hon. Friend accept that on the day when the victor of Enfield, Southgate is due to take

his seat, many people outside the House will be appalled to learn that its facilities are extended to convicted terrorists, whatever their cause?

Mr. Biffen: I think that there was a hidden message in that question, and if it is what I imagine it is, I do not think that anything that I could say would be half as adequate as what was said by the Labour Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks).

Mr. Benn: In congratulating the Prime Minister on her visit to Communist China to hand over British colonial control in Hong Kong, may I ask the Leader of the House to teli the right hon. Lady that that creates an excellent precedent for ending colonial control in the Falklands, Gibraltar and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman is in the market place of politics, and, very rightly, is marketing a very exotic brand that enables those issues to be linked. I think that we all understand why he sits where he does.

Q 5. **Mr. Dover** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dover: Does my right hon. Friend accept that any announcement made later today about the reduction in the percentage that local authorities can spend on capital expenditure from receipts from council house sales will be a bitter disappointment and a let-down to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have supported council house sales when the construction industry is at such a low level as it is today? Would that not show that the Government are able to control public expenditure only by cutting capital spending?

Mr. Biffen: I note with interest what my hon. Friend has to say, and I am sure he will realise that I cannot anticipate what may be said later by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Q 6. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes: As it appears that the youth training scheme is to be compulsory, wjll the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister whether she will ensure that machinery is set up to make sure that the scheme is not used, under any circumstances, for cheap labour?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little over-excited in this pre-festive season. I merely ask him to await the outcome of the inquiry that is being presided over by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Mr. Ward: Is my right hon. Friend surprised that, in order to get the electors of Enfield to read its election literature, the Liberal party found it necessary to disguise it as Labour party propaganda?

Mr. Biffen: There must be a very snappy and succinct answer to that question, but, alas, it eludes me. All that I can say is that that did not seem to succeed.

Q7. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Short: Given the propaganda from the Government Benches suggesting that the answer to unemployment is to cut wage levels, is there any decent minimum which the right hon. Gentleman thinks the people of Britain should earn in return for employment, or does he want our wage levels to drop to the standard in Third world countries?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Lady is confusing the argument that we should keep an increase in wage levels to below the rate of inflation with all those other arguments which she now makes and which are a total distortion. Again, I must ask her to judge the policy, not her own rhetoric.

Ethiopia Refugees

3.30 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport) *(by private notice)* asked the Minister for Overseas Development what urgent steps are being taken to fly in aid to the refugees from the Tigre province of Ethiopia who are now in camps in Sudan?

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): Eleven thousand, seven hundred and fifty tonnes of cereals aid from Britain for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were landed at Port Sudan in late November. We have just received a further appeal from the High Commissioner, and I have today decided to give £1 million to help him with this extremely serious problem.

Dr. Owen: While £1 million is helpful, does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that supplies are now urgently needed, as day by day the number of people in these camps increases and no extra food is scheduled to come in through the ports until the end of January? Is not there an urgent need for Hercules aircraft to be made available to fly in from Cyprus, through Egypt, to Sudan and which could land at the airstrip at Kassala? That should be done in the next few days if we are not to see a repeat of terrible hardship.

Will the Minister also comment on the stories that these refugees are being bombed by MIGs of the Ethiopian air force and that those who are supporting the liberation force in Tigre are being compulsorily moved south? One of the reasons for moving into Sudan is their fear that they will be unable to continue to live in Tigre. They are being compulsorily moved into the south of Ethiopia in order to take them out of the province of Tigre. This is a serious humanitarian issue which is getting worse day by day. I hope that the Minister will make RAF aircraft available as urgently as he can.

Mr. Raison: I accept that this is a serious problem, to which I am giving close attention. One must think cautiously about whether it is best to move substantial quantities of grain by aircraft. The important thing is to get the supplies there, and that we aim to do.

As to the attacks that are reported to have been made on people coming from the Tigre area, I have today asked our Ambassador in Addis Ababa to make it clear to the Government there that we hope that they will do nothing to damage the movement of people or food in these areas. I discussed resettlement with General Mengistu and others when I was in Addis Ababa recently, and I made it clear that we would watch cautiously anything that was happening in this regard. We are absolutely right to do so, and I was right to resist his plea for endorsement of their resettlement policy.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): At the outset I wholeheartedly welcome my right hon. Friend's timely initiative. Having visited the camps concerned with my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) only three weeks ago, I know that the situation on the ground is truly desperate. In the first camp we visited there were 25,000 Eritrean refugees and we were told that they were bombed by the Ethiopian air force, harassed by the Ethiopian army and driven from their homes by the Ethiopian armed forces. The Tigrean refugees were in a hideously desperate state. Unless the western Governments can find some way of dealing with the problem at source, and can get aid into those two provinces—huge areas of which are controlled by the Liberation forces and not by the Ethiopian Government—it will be difficult fully to alleviate the problem. Nevertheless, the Government of Sudan require every assistance, and what my right hon. Friend is providing is timely and welcome.

Mr. Raison: There is no doubt about the difficulty of getting food to these areas. I believe that the right way to get it there is through the medium of the experienced voluntary agencies. As for the bombing, I have already made my position clear on that point.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): If the Minister has not already done so, will he take steps to estimate the total likely drain of refugees into the Sudan in the next two to three months or more?

Mr. Raison: The best estimate I have is that arrivals by 15 December totalled 110,000 and that a further 150,000 to 160,000 might be expected by the end of March. Those are very substantial figures.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the only possible excuse for the vast grain mountains which are being piled up in Europe under the common agricultural policy would be the adoption of a policy of the utmost generosity towards not only the Sudan and Ethiopia but also the other countries of the southern Sahara which are desperately affected by the present famine and drought? Will my right hon. Friend consider the suggestion that Hercules aircraft should be provided? It is not just a question of supplies but of getting them there in time.

Mr. Raison: I accept entirely the point made by my hon. Friend that it is imperative to find ways of getting supplies to where they are most needed in time. We are considering carefully the best way to do this. As for the European grain mountain, I am sure that my hon. Friend will have noticed the recent decision of the European Community to provide no fewer than 1·2 million tonnes of grain before the next harvest. That is a very substantial quantity.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Is the Minister aware of the scale of the wheat surpluses not only in continental Europe but in Britain? Authoritative estimates suggest that 3 million tonnes of surplus wheat will be carried over from the current year into the crop year after the next harvest. Can the Minister not make a virtue of this surplus and ensure that before it is too late sufficient of this vitally needed food is transported to the areas where it is desperately needed.

Mr. Raison: I really do believe that the total of 1·2 million tonnes to which I have just referred represents a very substantial quantity of grain. It will be supplemented by very large contributions from the United States, Canada and other large scale grain producers.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): My right hon. Friend's announcement is indeed to be welcomed, but will he also recognise from his visit to Ethiopia that not only food but blankets and all sorts of medical supplies are urgently required in these camps? The figures which my right hon. Friend has been given of the number of people on the move from Eritrea and Tigre into Sudan are only part of the

problem. My right hon. Friend probably knows that 150,000 refugees from within the Sudan have moved to the Gezira region. It is a much bigger refugee problem than we realise.

Mr. Raison: I believe that I do understand the vastness of the problem, and I hope that I am taking appropriate action to deal with it. I accept my hon. Friend's point that it is not just a food problem. Immediately upon my return from Ethiopia I ordered a further consignment of 18,000 blankets to help to deal with the very severe problem of cold in some of these areas.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How many trucks has Britain sent?

Mr. Raison: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Will my right hon. Friend accept that although he is being implored by all sides of the House to send more and more aid, this country and the western world have to remember that the root cause of many of these problems is not just the drought but the viciousness of the régimes and complete administrative collapse. If we continue on this course, will my right hon. Friend accept that we shall be sending aid to almost every country in Africa, not just for one year but for the foreseeable future?

Mr. Raison: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the problems of Africa owe a great deal to maladministration and occasionally to viciousness on the part of the Governments concerned. But the fact remains that the human need is so enormous that we have no alternative but to respond as effectively and quickly as we possibly can.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Minister aware—[HON. MEMBERS: "Boo."]—that this year the Government are likely to spend some £30 million on storing grain for no good purpose whatsoever — *[Interruption.]* Will he tell the House exactly how much money is being spent on food aid this year to the African countries that are suffering drought? Is not the continual production of grain for stockpiling in Europe an insult—[HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Gentleman is an insult"]—to the poorest people in north Africa and should not his Government in future be diverting resources to development aid to those countries that are suffering so badly this year?

Mr. Raison: I have already given the House an idea of the substantial quantity of grain that is being committed to the support of Africa in the coming year. One fully understands that grain in store appears to be instantly available for dispatch, but there is a real cost to that. The cost of storing a tonne of grain for one year is about £25, but distributing it on the ground in Ethiopia is about £245.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that 80 per cent. of aid from the EEC is allocated to francophone countries and none to Sudan? If that is so, will he make certain that those decisions are reversed?

Mr. Raison: I very much doubt whether that is the case, but I shall certainly make sure that in discussions about how to use community aid in the coming year we shall ensure that it goes where it is most needed.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Is the Minister aware that my constituency has one of those grain warehouses stuffed to the roof with food grain? My constituents cannot understand, and neither can I, why that grain should remain there when there is famine in Africa.

Mr. Raison: As I have just said in reply to an earlier question, we must realise that there is a substantial cost in moving grain. Nevertheless, the Community, and our other major Western partners, have agreed to the shipment of substantial quantities of grain over the coming months.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend explain why only 1·2 million tonnes are being released from the European intervention stocks, in view of the cost of keeping it there, when I was told by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the other day that 10 million tonnes are currently in surplus in intervention stocks?

Mr. Raison: The point that I have just been making is that the cost of moving the grain is incomparably greater than the cost of storing the grain. We cannot doubt that fact. The 1·2 million tonnes which will be provided by the Community will make a major contribution to the problem that faces us.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is it the case, as reported in *The Times* today, that voluntary workers have been critical of the way in which the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has conducted affairs in southern Sudan? Has the right hon. Gentleman made any representations on that? I urge the right hon. Gentleman to be generous with grain, but will he point out that if many of the hon. Members who have been making the point about it had their way, there would be no grain in surplus to distribute?

Mr. Raison: It is certainly true that the surplus stocks produced by the common agricultural policy do enable us to get hold of grain fairly easily when the need arises.

I have not had detailed complaints about the operations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Sudan, but if there are feelings that he is not doing his job properly, I should be willing to take that up with him.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Of all the causes of mass starvation in Africa, including overpopulation and bad government, there is one—famine—which is not now beyond the capacity of man to overcome. What are the United Kingdom Government doing to lead an international campaign to eliminate famine?

Mr. Raison: We have this year, either bilaterally or through our membership of the EC, provided over £66 million of drought-related assistance to Africa, and we intend to continue, in conjunction with our partners—the Community, the World Bank and so on—to play a big part in trying to tackle the enormous development problems which face the African continent.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): The Minister must be aware of the judgment by War on Want and other agencies that, if there were no war in this area, there need be no famine. Why is he still washing his hands of the war? When he saw General Mengistu, did he or did he not ask for the Dergue Government to declare a cease-fire in response to the offer of safe passage made by the liberation fronts? Surely he is aware that the British public are scandalised by the fact that, while through aid efforts we are seeking to save life in Ethiopia, the Addis Government appear ready to take it.

Mr. Raison: I said to the Ethiopian Government that I hoped that they would do all that they could to allow the movement of aid to those areas where it is most needed. As I have told the hon. Gentleman and the House before, I believe that the best way of dealing with the problem is by working through the voluntary agencies and the International Red Cross. To ask the Ethiopian Government to do something that they certainly would not do will not really help to deal with this very difficult problem.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take points of order afterwards.

Mr. Snape: With respect——

Mr. Speaker: There is no "with respect" about it. I shall take points of order afterwards.

Local Authority Capital Expenditure (England)

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about local authority capital expenditure in England in the coming financial year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be making a statement later.

Since May 1979, local authorities in England have sold more than 600,000 homes to their tenants. The success of this policy, coupled with sales of other assets, has generated very substantial capital receipts which local authorities have been able to spend over a period of time. This statement is about the consequences for next year's capital spending programme.

On 18 July I explained to the House that in 1983-84 there had been an overspend of £368 million on the main local authority cash limit for capital expenditure. I warned that we could be heading for a much larger overspend this year. That was why I had to ask local authorities to exercise restraint.

Most authorities have complied with my request and I am grateful to them, but some have chosen to ignore it. So although the amount of the overspend this year has certainly been reduced it is still likely to be higher than in 1983-84 and I must therefore maintain my appeal for restraint for the rest of this financial year.

Consequent upon the Government's decisions published by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his autumn statement, I have to announce that plans for local authority capital spending in England for next year will be just over £4 billion. Receipts are expected to be about £2·1 billion and the cash limit on net expenditure is therefore being set at £1·95 billion. This net figure forms part of the Government's public expenditure planning total for next year. Any excess would be a potential charge on the contingency reserve.

Unless corrective action is taken, local authorities could well breach the cash limit next year as happened in 1983-84 and is happening this year. The problem arises because the accumulated reserves of capital receipts are now estimated at some £5 billion.

Those reserves belong to the local authorities. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] What is at issue is the pace at which they may be spent. To reduce the risk of overspending next year we have to reduce the proportion of receipts which an authority may spend in any one year. For housing receipts, the prescribed proportion will be reduced from 40 per cent. to 20 per cent. from next April. For other receipts—for example, from the sale of land —the proportion will be 30 per cent. Local authorities will continue to have the right to use the balance of their receipts, but spread over a longer period. Without these changes, there is little doubt that there would have been substantial overspending next year. This in turn would be bound to lead to disruptive mid-year corrective action. It is clearly in the interests of local authorities to reduce that risk.

We shall be notifying individual authorities of their allocations shortly. I am honouring the assurance that I gave last year that housing allocations would be at least 80 per cent. of those for the present year.

Authorities that have complied in full with my request for restraint this year will receive an extra allocation next year amounting to an extra 5 per cent. across all service blocks. I estimate that this may add about £100 million to the total of allocations.

To help local authorities to plan their capital programme we are increasing from 2 per cent. to 5 per cent. the right to carry forward an underspend of the national cash limit from one year to the next. There will also be a margin of 5 per cent. above the cash limit up to which no corrective action within the year will be sought.

Subject to the same sort of provisos as last year, I can repeat last year's assurance that for the housing and other services blocks, allocations for 1986-87 will be at least 70 per cent. of those for the current year. For 1987-88, authorities can count on receiving at least 80 per cent. of 1985-86 allocations.

Apart from those assurances, the decisions that I have announced today relate only to 1985-86. I am consulting the local authority associations about possible changes to the system for the longer term.

Hon. Members: Resign!

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement will be received with horror by people on housing waiting lists, by those waiting for improvement grants, and by workers and management in the building industry? Does not his announcement represent another humiliating defeat for himself and his Department at the hands of the Treasury? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, stripped of the jargon, he has today announced a cut of £400 million in housing investment and the freezing of £1·2 billion of local authorities' own assets—their own money? Will not the consequences of this decision be appalling for all those in difficulty in the housing sector — for people wanting homes as well as those engaged in the industry?

Does not the statement show to be sheer hypocrisy the comments of the Minister for Housing and Construction last Friday? The Minister said:

"Homelessness is taken into account in deciding housing investment".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 1339.]

Does the statement not mark the introduction of another draconian control by the freezing of local authorities' own cash in the bank? Will the Secretary of State tell us how his statement will help the homeless, the building and contruction industry or unemployed building workers? What credible macro-economic arguments can he adduce to support his decision?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there are 1·25 million households on local authority waiting lists, almost 200,000 households living in overcrowded accommodation, 2,500,000 dwellings requiring repairs and 78,000 households which are homeless at present?

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): The Government do not care.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman's announcement today will have a catastrophic effect on owner-occupiers, more than 100,000 of whom are currently waiting for improvement grants. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that we shall have a debate on his announcement in Government time so that the House can debate these crucial issues and decide whether it will agree with what has been announced today?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that, in the best year of the Government's housing policy, there were 214,000 starts, a figure which fell short by 50,000 of the lowest total achieved under the preceding Labour Government? Will the right hon. Gentleman also recognise that the current building programme is heading for the lowest number of completions of council houses ever recorded, and the second lowest total for all housing completions?

The statement is a kick in the teeth for the building and construction industry. It flies in the face of all the advice that the right hon. Gentleman and his ministerial colleagues have received, right across the board, from employers' federations, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the CBI, the TUC, Shelter, the Shelter Housing Aid Centre, the Institute of Housing and everyone concerned with housing problems.

Will the right hon. Gentleman finally admit that his statement is yet another blow to the shire counties, because their authorisation for expenditure of their own receipts is reduced from 50 per cent. to 30 per cent.—and that in a week when the Audit Commission urged that capital investment by education authorities should be increased to meet the problems of education, especially in the shire counties?

Since the Government came to office, there has been a 64 per cent. cut in real terms in housing investment programmes. Even when capital receipts are taken into account, the figure is still 54 per cent. The Government are now spending less than 50 per cent. of what the Labour Government spent on Britain's housing needs. It is a disgrace.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman does not seem, even now, to have hoisted on board the fact that it has been the Government's policy consistently since we took office in 1979 to——

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): To cut everything.

Mr. Jenkin: —to help the private sector to recognise that the great majority of people wish to become owner-occupiers. It is in the context of the expansion of owner-occupation that the success of the Government's policy is to be seen.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be under the illusion that, somehow, the announcement that I have made today represents a further reduction in spending on housing beyond what was announced in the autumn statement. He is quite wrong and he ought to know that the figure which was agreed last month for housing investment was £3·055 billion. It remains £3·055 billion. The measures that I have announced today are intended to ensure that that figure of £3·055 billion is delivered. As for the effect on the building industry, perhaps I might remind the hon. Gentleman that its output grew last year by 4 per cent. in real terms. It has grown by a further 4 per cent. this year and the latest forecast, which has taken account of the autumn statement, says that that output is likely to be maintained or even increased slightly next year. The forecast was produced by the Building Materials Producers Association.

The hon. Gentleman referred to homelessness. He might note that there are today more than 25,000 local authority homes which have been empty for more than one year. [HON. MEMBERS: "They need repairs."] They are

[Mr. Jenkin]

homes that local authorities could well use to deal with the problem of homelessness. As for improvement grants, I made it clear when the autumn statement was published that the Government gave a substantial boost to home improvement grants to the private sector and that the number increased tenfold over what had been done by the Labour Government. However, we did not see that as a permanent feature of housing policy—it was a two-year boost. The hon. Gentleman asked whether there would be a debate. That is a matter to be fixed through the usual channels, but the change in the prescribed proportion requires to be made by order.

Hon. Members: Resign.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand, and even hear, the strong feelings of hon. Members on this matter, but another statement and an important Estimates debate are to follow, I propose to allow questions on this statement to continue for half an hour before I call the next statement.

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): Into what state of decay is our physical environment to be allowed to sink before the Government recognise the distinction between just spending money and investing it to create real jobs and real wealth? Will we have to wait for a typhoid epidemic or some other disaster before the Government will permit essential expenditure on infrastructure in our towns and cities?

Mr. Jenkin: The Government maintain a substantial programme of spending on infrastructure. Because my right hon. and learned Friend chose to mention typhoid, may I remind him that only this year we announced a significant increase in the capital investment in the water industries. I hope that that investment has his approval. A higher proportion of local authority capital expenditure is, rightly, spent on the refurbishment and renovation of defective housing stock. Only this year, we added a new factor to the generalised needs index to take account of the obligations of local authorities to improve defective housing.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): How is it that the Secretary of State can tell the House, as he did in July, that capital spending makes a valuable contribution to this country's infrastructure and then be party to a policy which, a few years ago, first told off local authorities for not spending their capital, then provided them under the right-to-buy law with an opportunity to have more capital to spend, and now tells them that they cannot do as they choose with the money which, as the right hon. Gentleman says, is theirs? That leaves 800,000 people without homes this Christmas. How is that justifiable by any Government's policy at any time?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has ignored the fact that since the system of capital control was introduced, it has always been recognised that local authorities could spend in any one year only a proportion of their receipts and that the balance would be carried forward for spending in another year. The proportions that operated during the last couple of years have led to a substantial capital overspend on the national cash limit. I have announced a reduction in the proportions that may be spent in one year, but the local authorities will keep their receipts and will be entitled to spend them in the years ahead. The local authorities will phase their spending more sensibly to be within the Government's cash limits. That is a perfectly sensible policy.

Mr. Francis Pym (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that this highly restrictive policy will be greeted by local government with a sense of injustice? Is this not another example of central direction and control? Is there any prospect of my right hon. Friend unlocking historic receipts which represent a substantial fund of assets that could be invested for the benefit of the community and, incidentally, help employment? Can my right hon. Friend hold out any hope that he will establish a long-term basis upon which the relationship with local government can be conducted unmolested by frequent ad hoc intervention by the Government?

Mr. Jenkin: Taking the last point first, my right hon. Friend will have heard that I am discussing with the local authority associations revised arrangements for the capital control system, which is not perfect and cannot be in operation for next year. I hope that a satisfactory arrangement can be operated in the years ahead. My right hon. Friend talked about unlocking capital receipts, but, in recent years, local authorities have made substantial use of their capital receipts. Our problem is that the overhang could give rise to a large potential overspend on the national cash limit which forms part of the public expenditure total. As my right hon. Friend knows, for years it has been the practice of successive Governments when drawing their bottom line to include a maximum figure for local authority capital spending. I am trying to ensure that that figure will be delivered and not substantially overspent.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): In the face of the decay of housing in part of my constituency, did the Secretary of State instigate this policy and take it into Cabinet, or can it be called the revenge of the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman should not read some of the nonsensical statements in the press about that. Before the autumn statement, the Cabinet agreed the total of £3·055 billion to be spent on the housing programme next year by local authorities, new towns and the Housing Corporation. That is the figure that stands today. I have announced measures to ensure that the cash limit is not substantially overspent. The Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a distinguished Member followed that practice. It is a responsible practice. On 6 December, the House approved the autumn statement and its figures. It is necessary to ensure that those figures can be delivered, and that is what I have announced today.

Mr John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that £2·3 billion is locked up in local authority coffers in long-term mortgages granted to people who have exercised their right to buy? In view of falling interest rates, would it not be in the interests of those council's ratepayers, as much as in the interests of the borrowers of those mortgages, if that money were made available to building societies, thereby releasing money for local authorities to spend?

Mr. Jenkin: I can confirm the figure of £2·3 billion on the local authority books. If local authorities can sell their mortgage books to building societies or other financial institutions, there would be an addition to their receipts and a prescribed proportion of those receipts could be added to the sums local authorities spend on capital investment.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that, because of his Christmas message today, tens of thousands of families continue to live in housing misery and some 25 per cent. of all building workers will remain on the dole? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, if he had the slightest sense of self-respect he would resign rather than allow the Chancellor to have this victory over him today?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that I am announcing capital expenditure by local authorities of more than £4 billion. That is a substantial sum by any standard. In these circumstances, and when the building industry is happily expanding—it has grown by 4 per cent. in two successive years—it is not unreasonable that the public sector should be expected to live within the cash limits that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has published.

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): When these matters were discussed in Cabinet, did my right hon. Friend tell his colleagues that this country urgently needs a major new house building programme to provide homes for the homeless and jobs for the jobless?

Mr. Jenkin: I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that, overwhelmingly, people want to buy and live in the homes they own. It is right, therefore, that the private sector of the building industry should be given every encouragement to provide those homes for potential home owners. There is, of course, a need for housing for special groups — the disabled, elderly, and so on — *[Interruption.]* The programme I have announced allows substantial sums to be invested next year by local authorities and the Housing Corporation to provide for those special needs. I do not regard it as part of the normal duty of local authorities to provide huge volumes of new housing for general occupation.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): What sort of house do you live in?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the Secretary of State aware that many of us accepted the principle of the sale of council houses as rational and reasonable and, in fact, in some ways overdue? That sale was sought on the basis of the fact that the receipts from the sales would accrue to local authorities. What the Secretary of State is doing today will be regarded by those local authorities as a sordid swindle.

Mr. Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Nothing that I have said takes that money away from the local authorities. All that I am asking them to do—many people would regard it as a sensible way to spend capital money—is to phase spending over a number of years, so that the total of capital spending is in accordance with the Government's overall spending priorities.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend understand that most local authorities will look upon this as yet another hammer blow against their freedoms of action? Does he further understand, or has anyone advised him, about the housing decay and the infrastructure that decays by the day in our cities? Will he explain to the House how it can be harmful to the economy to turn one capital asset into repairing and maintaining other capital assets? Does he not understand that, if we go on as we are now, with these voodoo economics, where we stick pins in all those people who carried out the policies that most of us believed in, we shall have no freedoms left, we shall have no homes left, and we shall have no sound and sane cities left. Will he change those policies at last and restore some sense and balance between local and central Government?

Mr. Jenkin: I admire the inventiveness of my hon. Friend's language more than the economic logic of his argument. My hon. Friend has considerable understanding of financial matters. He will be aware, therefore, that local authorities, which have used accumulated receipts to pay off loans or reduce the overall balance between their borrowing and lending, and which now want to use those receipts to undertake new capital expenditure, will inevitably have to increase their net borrowing to finance it. That is bound to bring pressure upon the public sector borrowing requirement. Although it is entirely right that substantial sums should nevertheless be spent on housing and other local authority capital projects — I have already given the House the figures—it is necessary to phase it over a number of years and not to allow substantial sums to be concentrated in a single year and so put the borrowing requirement under pressure.

Mr. J. D. Concannon (Mansfield): Does the Secretary of State hold clinic mornings in his constituency? If he does, he must realise that more and more people are going to see their Member of Parliament about not having a house, or about a house that is falling down and requires repairs, and about a lack of grant? Will the Minister answer those points, and at the same time inform me and many other people why anyone should want to be a councillor under this Government?

Mr. Jenkin: Local authorities have a wide measure of discretion in what they spend——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Can you hear?

Mr. Jenkin: —but most local authorities have always recognised that for revenue and capital spending they live within the broad limits which the Government propose and the House approves. All I am asking this year is that, after two years—*[Interruption.]* No, what I am asking—it is for the House to decide—is that after two years when the local authorities capital cash limit was substantially overspent and involved substantial claims on the contingency reserve, and faced with the potential overspend next year, we should take steps to do what we can to keep it under control. That is a reasonable thing, which any Government faced with the same problem would do.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): As there is apparently now some £5 billion accumulated reserves, can my right hon. Friend explain why we should be asking councils to pursue our policy of selling council houses, when plainly that is no longer of much benefit to them? Will he be kind enough to explain to me why those

[Mr. Fred Silvester]

reserves cannot be used to help the manifest deterioration of the housing stock which is visible in many of our large cities?

Mr. Jenkin: On the first point, the main engine for the sale of council houses has been the right to buy. That gives the tenant the right to demand, subject to the legislation, that he should be entitled to buy the house in which he lives. That right to buy is unimpaired. It is as strong as ever. It will result in substantial further sales of council houses to their tenants. I know that that has a great deal of support on both sides of the House. The question of how far and how fast local authorities may spend their accumulated capital receipts must be considered in the context of the public expenditure programme as a whole. It would make no sense to allow the expenditure to become bunched, as there is every prospect that it would, so as substantially to exceed the cash limit which the Chancellor has established, and which was approved by the House when it approved the autumn statement. It would throw the Government's economic planning into disarray.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Secretary of State will be aware that, during his visit to Liverpool, he recognised that Liverpool had the worst housing in the United Kingdom. What prospect does that local authority have of improving it, in view of the fact that today he is turning the screws again on local authorities, ignoring their needs, and further damaging the construction industry, in which there is unemployment of about 30 per cent. in that area?

Mr. Jenkin: I am well aware of the serious housing conditions in Liverpool. I and my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction have been to see them. I hope that the leaders of Liverpool city council will now agree to resume discussions with officials of my Department in the normal way, as every other local authority has done, so that we can agree a sensible HIP allocation. There is no sense in starting to shout and indulge in slogans accusing me of breaking promises when I have done no such thing.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): My right hon. Friend will remember that the Housing Act 1980 contained a special provision designed to prevent houses in designated rural areas migrating from homes into holiday homes. Will he therefore exempt the operation of the buy-back provisions from the capital controls? The sums of money involved are small, but, without that exemption, the will of Government and Parliament in that respect could, in practice, be frustrated.

Mr. Jenkin: I understand the importance which my hon. Friend attaches to that matter. I shall, if I may, write to him about it.

Mr. Janner: What possible logic can there be in requiring a city such as Leicester, as the Minister has now done, to freeze its housing money after last week requiring it to use its reserve to put down the rates? When a council is thereby forced to cut its contracts and to go back on its contractual obligations, who will pay the penalties? Will it be the Government or the ratepayer? Who will benefit? Will it be the unemployed?

Mr. Jenkin: The ratepayers of Leicester will benefit because Leicester city council, having built up substantial revenue reserves, is only to be asked to disgorge some of them for the benefit of its ratepayers. It has nothing to do with capital reserves.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): What calculation has my right hon. Friend made of the effect of this economically incomprehensible statement on the number of unemployed in the construction industry?

Mr. Jenkin: The economics of this statement are in support of a policy that my hon. Friend has supported consistently for the past five years — that the Government should keep their borrowing and spending under tight control. That is the policy upon which we are engaged with the support of a large number of people in this country. Capital spending by local authorities next year at over £4 billion is as provided in the autumn statement. All that I am asking is that the spending of the accumulations of capital should be spread over a reasonable period. That is why I am proposing the alteration to the prescribed proportion.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Will the Secretary of State accept that thousands of council tenants in constituencies such as mine will never be able to afford to buy their homes and are condemned to live in damp, vandalised, substandard accommodation? Does he accept that thousands of building trade workers are looking for a job, and that local authorities are sitting on more than £4 billion of capital receipts? In those circumstances how can he justify preventing local councils from spending their money on what needs to be done now, not at an unspecified date in the future?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman should know that in many inner cities there have been between 40 and 50 successful examples of housing estates, where councils have entered into partnership with private developers to refurbish the estate. I hope that more councils will see that as a solution to the problem of their run-down inner city estates. Regarding the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I have nothing to add to what I have already said.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the housing stock in the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames is extremely well managed, and that that council began selling council houses to tenants before many other councils? Will he ensure that the council is not penalised because of the profligacy of authorities represented by many Labour Members? Will he guarantee that the council will be able to carry out Government policy by renovating run-down, inter-war stock and providing improvement grants for owner-occupiers?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend will have noticed that I announced an additional 5 per cent. to the allocations of the majority of authorities which complied with my request for restraint last year. He will also note—the point was impressed hard on us by a number of those who came to see my hon. Friends and me about the request for restraint—that the complaint was made that we were penalising authorities that had already sold assets and had receipts, to the advantage of those that still had assets to sell. The new prescribed proportions that I announced today will apply equally to in-year receipts and accumulated receipts. Therefore, there will be no discrimination against those who have already acquired them.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): When the Secretary of State says that he has not announced any new cuts in housing expenditure in his statement, is he saying that the figures for housing expenditure in the Chancellor's autumn economic statement included the prescribed proportion of accumulated capital receipts? Or will he admit that in announcing a reduction in that proportion today from 40 per cent. to 20 per cent., he has announced a new cut in housing expenditure?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I have announced measures that will be necessary to deliver the housing figures that were in the autumn statement. The autumn statement included figures for local authority capital expenditure, and the measures are to prevent a substantial overspend of those figures.

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will accept that the powers enjoyed by local authorities are derived from powers given to them by the House. However, is he not worried that at a time of recession capital expenditure has been cut more than current expeniture, and that as a result, the type of investment that can lead us out of the recession has been needlessly docked?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will know that during the past four or five years local authority revenue expeniture has substantially exceeded the guidelines laid down by the House. For that reason, we have inevitably had to consider other areas of expenditure to keep the Government's total within the limits approved by the House. I entrirely agree with my hon. Friend that if we can get local authorities' current expenditure down —we are doing that through rate capping—we can take an easier view of their capital spending.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Why does not the Secretary of State come clean? Is he not forcing local authorities to increase their balances so that he can further cut their grants next year? Is he aware that not even the Prime Minister defines overspending as spending one's own money?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is confusing revenue balances with capital balances. They have nothing to do with each other.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a number of reasonable district councils are becoming increasingly frustrated at seeing their reasonable ambitions thwarted in spite of the fact that they are based on the successful implementation of a very popular policy? Will he consider their exasperation? Do I understand that the implications of his remarks are that if his number-crunching does not come out right this year, he will consider a moratorium next year?

Mr. Jenkin: In answer to my hon. Friend's first point, I am well aware of the disappointment of authorities. He is right to mention small district authorities, which may not have large capital expenditure programmes but whose programmes are dear to their hearts. I ask that programmes are phased over a period of years so that in aggregate the spending does not exceed the limits laid down by the Government. On my hon. Friend's second point, I hope that the measures I have taken will avoid any severe mid-term disruption. I have already said that we agree that there can be a 5 per cent. margin, with no question of coming to the House and asking for futher restraint. If an excess goes substantially beyond that, I do not rule out the need to come to the House and ask for restraint.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that if we accept the Treasury cuts —they are Treasury cuts—his Christmas message, as clear as a bell, will be no homes for the homeless? Instead of passively accepting the Treasury's decision, why does he not recognise, in the light of our exchanges this afternoon, that nearly the entire House is against the Treasury, and that it can be defeated? If he mobilises hon. Members on both sides, he can ensure that the Treasury treats these cuts as it treated the proposed cuts in student grants.

Mr. Jenkin: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says. I would quarrel with him in his use of the word "passive". I recognise that the measure will be a disappointment to local authorities because they will be asked to spread their capital spending over a longer period than they had hoped. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to accept that the measure is in the interest of the overall management of public spending and that it is part of the policy that the Government have followed for many years.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): If the Secretary of State sincerely believes that construction has increased during the past few years, why has the number of building workers out of work increased? Is he fully prepared to listen to the view of the construction industry, which will be exasperated and frustrated, and will show sheer disbelief at his announcement?

Mr. Jenkin: I assure my hon. Friend that I took many opportunities to listen to the views of the construction industry. The figures that I quoted about the 4 per cent. in real terms expansion last year, the further 4 per cent. in real terms expansion this year, and the prospects of maintaining or even increasing that growth next year, are accepted by the construction industry. They represent a welcome turn-round from earlier years.

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): Is it not the case that DoE officials have great doubts about those statistics? Will the Secretary of State please tell the House and my constituents in Brent how many of the 1,000 families who are living in bed and breakfast accommodation and other temporary hostels will be rehoused if the Government continually cut capital expenditure? Will he tell the construction industry and the House how we shall carry out the £10 billion worth of work on faulty houses and the £20 billion of expenditure required on private housing to bring them up to a decent standard? How does he expect that work to be done while he cuts capital expenditure?

Mr. Jenkin: To take the right hon. Gentleman's last point, the Government have never accepted and do not accept, that it is the responsibility of the taxpayer to maintain private houses. It is the responsibility of their owners. However, for people at the bottom of the incomes scale there can be a limited system of housing improvement grants, and I ask the right hon. Gentleman to await the consultation paper that we shall publish soon. There was a full debate on homelessness in the House on Friday and I commend to the right hon. Gentleman the speech made then by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is it not true that authorities such as Bromley, which have enthusiastically carried out the Government's policy of selling houses and land, are being positively penalised by the Government? Can my right hon. Friend explain, in layman's terms that non-economists can understand, why he will prevent authorities such as Bromley from carrying out projects that would create local employment, that would be paid from their resources and that could not possibly affect the PSBR?

Mr. Jenkin: I must ask my hon. Friend to accept that it has been a continuing policy of the Government for five years to try to control the general level of public spending and borrowing. There is no way in which that can exclude capital spending. I share my hon. Friend's aim, whereby, by achieving better control over local authority revenue overspending, we could devote more resources to capital spending. But until we can do that I must ask local authorities to live within the overall cash limit that the Government have laid down and that the House has approved.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said that I would end questions on this statement at 4.30 pm, but there appears to be great interest in it. Therefore, I propose to allow questions to continue for not more than another 10 minutes. Then we must move to the next statement, in fairness to those who are anxious to speak later.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think I shall take a point of order now. It simply takes up time.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can the Secretary of State advise me about what I should tell my constituents in my surgery this Saturday when they ask me why the local authority is refusing to give them improvement grants, to repair their homes or to carry out modernisation, when they know that next year Allerdale district council will be carrying at least £3·5 million in its balances on capital receipt account? How can we answer the complaints of those constituents who have a genuine grievance and who demand action from the public authorities?

Mr. Jenkin: The first answer that the hon. Gentleman should give to his constituents is that it is for the local authority to determine its priorities within the overall spending limits that have been laid down. The hon. Gentleman should be able to explain to his constituents that there cannot be unlimited spending either on capital or revenue accounts, and that inevitably, if the figures are to add up at the end of the day, the Government are responsible for laying down the rate at which capital receipts can be spent—*[Interruption.]* I understand their problems, but it is the primary responsibility of those who own their homes to maintain them, not to ask the taxpayer to do so.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that what really matters is not a Treasury forecast of what might become an overspend but the creation of jobs, and that there are few more sensible ways of doing that than by renovating the housing stock, which is not import-intensive? Is he aware that many of his colleagues sympathise with him, in that he and not the Chancellor has been forced to come to the House to present this defence? Does he not believe that the power of the Treasury has increased, is increasing and should be diminished?

Mr. Jenkin: I assure my hon. Friend that my announcement today is the policy of Her Majesty's Government, as determined by the Cabinet. There is no question of it being the policy of one Minister or another. My hon. Friend knows that there must be a limit on public spending if we are to maintain the strategy on which we have embarked. That must include capital spending. We cannot stand by idly and allow massive overspend on local authority capital accounts or any other capital accounts. That is the purpose of cash limits.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Should not two broad conclusions be drawn from the statement: first, that the Secretary of State has no support from Conservative Members for his miserable statement; and, secondly, that the Government and the Conservative party no longer give a damn about the poor and deprived who live in desperate housing need in the many deprived areas of Britain?

Mr. Jenkin: I refute completely the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. We are making provision for more than £4,000 million of local authority and Housing Corporation investment, which will provide overwhelmingly for those at the bottom of the incomes scale. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that accusation. On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I am bound to say that I did not expect a warm welcome for my statement, but it is part of the responsibilities of office to come to the Chamber and tell people the truth.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In his statement last week my right hon. Friend clobbered many local authorities run by his friends. What steps has he taken with this announcement not to clobber the same authorities?

Mr. Jenkin: I hope that my hon. Friend recognises the fact that we have deliberately set aside a sum that we estimate to be about £100 million to be added to the allocations of the responsible authorities which complied with my request of last July. I hope that that goes some way to meeting my hon. Friend's anxiety.

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): Is the Secretary of State aware that earlier this year an all-party delegation of members of Rochdale borough council visited the Minister for Housing and Construction to express their grave anxiety about the housing stock in the Rochdale area? Is he further aware that, following our invitation, the Minister for Housing and Construction visited the borough and, at my personal invitation, visited the worst housing estate that I have ever seen — the Back o' the Moss estate—where he saw the dreadful conditions in which those human beings must exist? What Christmas message of good cheer do I have to take back to those good people?

Mr. Jenkin: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take time off during the Christmas recess to inspect in neighbouring Oldham the former Strinesdale estate, which conformed precisely to the description of the estate that he has just given but which, with the help of the private sector, has been substantially refurbished and is now a pleasant place in which to live. I hope that Rochdale borough council and many other councils that have similar

estates will try to achieve in partnership with the private sector what they have been clearly unable to achieve on their own.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Did not my right hon. Friend hit the nail on the head in his previous answer? Is not the reality that £4,000 million is a hell of a lot of money? It amounts to £75 for every man, woman and child in the country, which every year represents £6 a week for a family of four? Is not the worst housing crisis in those areas, with largely Labour-controlled authorities, where housing resources have been violently mismanaged? Is not the answer to the problems of the taxpayer, the ratepayer and the homeless to privatise large sections of public authority housing?

Mr. Jenkin: I hope that we shall achieve greater private investment in inner city housing. There have been some successful pioneer schemes by several local authorities. My hon. Friend is right to say that that is the way in which we shall bring new hope and life to many decrepit, run-down areas.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Secretary of State aware that the most pitiful aspect of his statement is that he seems to lack all knowledge of what is happening on the ground? Is he aware that Lawrie Barratt and others in the building industry have recently said that the joint venture schemes that the right hon. Gentleman has just described will no longer be able to continue as a result of the imposition of 15 per cent. VAT on building charges? Is he aware that the Sefton Conservative-controlled county council is one of the wax models into which he is sticking pins? Is he aware that there are already cases of dysentry in the Church Street estate in my constituency because that local authority, following his request for voluntary restraint, introduced a moratorium and has not got the money to put the drains or the houses right? Is he aware that today he has announced the death of the public sector building programme and that this is a worthy Christmas present from this Government to the homeless and the badly housed.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is talking a great deal of rubbish. To describe expenditure of £4,000 million as the death of the public sector building programme is hyperbole which goes even beyond the hon. Gentleman's normal standard. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are aware of many of the difficult housing conditions in our inner cities but we have to recognise that, over the years, despite the expenditure of large sums of public money, many of those problems have become worse. I point out the contrast where the private sector has come in, and many black spots have been turned into nice places in which to live.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my hon. Friend accept that effectively he is being accused of a cut in national investment? Will he put that accusation into perspective by confirming what I understand is the position, which is that last year there was an increase in both public and private investment and that, if current trends are followed, there will be an increase in that investment next year as well?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is quite right. Construction output in the first three-quarters of this year is around £750 million up on the same period a year ago and the latest figures for new orders show a 6 per cent. increase in the 12 months up to the end of October over the previous 12 months. Private industrial orders are up by 30 per cent. and private commercial orders are up by 11 per cent. Hon. Members should bear those figures in mind when they complain about the impact on the construction industry.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): What has happened since November 1982? The Prime Minister said then, in the debate on the Queen's Speech:

> "We need more capital spending by local government and in the public sector generally."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1982; Vol. 31, c. 21.]

Today, the Minister has announced a major change in Government policy. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the figures that he has just given for the construction industry show how badly the construction industry has been affected? Today, it is working at a level that is 50 per cent. lower than in 1974. Will he put a figure to the question that he was asked earlier about the effect of today's announcement on jobs? Does he agree that the effect, counting the indirects, will mean 100,000 fewer jobs in construction and building next year?

Is it not desirable that we should, whatever the mix of public and private investment, get housing building starts back to the level of even the lowest year under the last Labour Government? Does the Minister accept that we should improve, maintain and repair the housing stock at a rate that is at least equal to the rate at which it is deteriorating? I should like, and I think that the House would welcome, firm solid answers to those questions.

Does the Minister know what it is like to be homeless on a waiting list, knowing that the local authority does not have the money either to build or repair? Why has the Minister launched such an attack on young owner-occupiers, who have been encouraged to buy both in the public and private sectors on the firm Government promise that there would be improvement and repair grants to put in inside toilets, proper bathrooms, kitchens and to re-wire electrical systems? Why has the Minister produced such a policy today? In the 11 years that I have been in the House, this is the most contemptible and disgraceful statement that I have ever heard from any Minister.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has asked many questions, some of which were repeats of questions that have already been asked——

Mr. Rooker: But not answered.

Mr. Jenkin: They were answered earlier in the exchanges.

The hon. Gentleman's last point was about home improvements grants policy. The Government have made it clear that the system of mandatory grants for essential amenities is an important part of our housing provision. That will remain, and I hope that those who have bought houses without basic amenities will be able to apply for those grants. They are mandatory. On the wider discretionary improvement grants, there is no question of anybody having been promised that there would for all time——

Mr. Rooker: Yes they were.

Mr. Jenkin: No. The hon. Gentleman should examine what has been said. There is no question of any promise that for all time there would be a system of discretionary grants, whether on the miserable level left behind by the Labour Government, or on the very much higher level that

[Mr. Jenkin]

we achieved last year and the year before. It is primarily the responsibility of home owners to maintain their houses, and it is not the responsibility of the general body of taxpayers. That principle is warmly supported in many parts of the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I normally take points of order at the end. Does this point of order rise directly out of the statement?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order to give you and the House notice that, following the next statement, I shall be seeking the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10 so that we can have an immediate opportunity to discuss the implications of this statement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a point of order rising out of the statement.

We all understand that you have a somewhat difficult task, Mr. Speaker, when a Minister has to come to the Dispatch Box, and we understand that it is your job to select the people to ask him various questions. On this occasion, we understand that it was even more difficult. We realise that your job is to provide balance and to call a number of hon. Members supporting the Government and a number of hon. Members against. Is it not reaching a sordid level when Tory Whips have to go round to nobble a few people at the fag end of questions to get people to support the Government because everybody else is against them?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The last point of order was spurious, but in fairness, and as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) called for balance, I shall take the further point of order.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The last remark made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was about Whips talking to Government Back Benchers. The Whips may have spoken to Back Benchers, but they did not speak to me.

Mr. Concannon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I shall be brief, and, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I do not usually raise points of order. However, I notice that the Leader of the House has been toing and froing during the statement and I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to make a statement on the future of this announcement, which has found few friends in the House? I understand that the Leader of the House has been out talking to the Patronage Secretary, and I have seen him out of the corner of my eye talking to you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have no idea why hon. Members leave the Chamber.

Local Authority Capital Expenditure (Wales)

4.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): Mr. Speaker, with permission I wish to make a statement about the future arrangements for controlling local authority capital spending in Wales and the level and distribution of capital resources in 1985-86. The decisions that I am announcing this afternoon—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that I have had the desired effect, as things are quieter now. I could not hear a word that the Secretary of State was saying.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Edwards: The decisions that I am announcing this afternoon have to be seen against the background that since 1979-80 Welsh local authorities have invested, at 1984-85 prices, £2·2 billion in a wide range of projects which have significantly extended and improved the social and economic infrastructure in Wales. The Government's expenditure plans to be published in the forthcoming Public Expenditure White Paper, envisage that over the next three years they should invest a further £1 billion, again at 1984-85 prices. The largest service element within this total of £3·2 billion is some £1·4 billion in respect of housing.

In the course of the review of the control system which was announced in July, I have considered carefully the views both of the Welsh Counties Committee and the Committee of Welsh District Councils. They have emphasised the need for greater flexibility. They attached particular importance to being given a better view of the future trend in resources, and argued strongly for continued access to their reserve of accumulated receipts. Discussions on the way in which the system could be developed will continue in the new year.

Having taken full account of the associations' representations, the Government have decided to make a significant change to the rules governing the operation of the national cash limit. The present facility for carrying forward to the following year an underspend of up to 2 per cent. against the aggregate planning total, will be increased to 5 per cent. In addition, corrective action will not be taken to restrain spending if the cash limit is on course to be exceeded by less than 5 per cent. Any overspending will be taken into account when determining provision for a subsequent year. These changes should greatly reduce the possibility that we have to take corrective action part way through the year, and ensure that resources are not lost if there is only a moderate degree of underspending.

A principal reason for the capital overspending experienced in Wales in the last two years is that the allocation mechanism has not so far taken account of the inherent spending power provided by accumulated receipts. These are expected to amount to over £300 million next year, all but £10 million being in the district tier.

Districts argue that they should have complete freedom to spend their accumulated receipts; but not only would this have serious consequences for public expenditure control generally—and the level of PSBR—but it would

enable them to spend a major part of their receipts twice. This is because while housing allocations issued since 1981-82 have been calculated to include a large proportion of receipts forecast to accrue in each year, at the same time districts have been able to borrow to finance the bulk of their housing spending without needing to use the receipts built into the allocation. For this reason, they have been able to accumulate large reserves. It is reasonable to place a measure of constraint on their ability to use these receipts for a second time.

I have, therefore, decided to phase the use of these receipts by reducing, but not eliminating, the proportion which can be used to enhance the spending power of allocations in any one year. In the case of housing the proportion will be reduced by 10 percentage points from 25 to 15 per cent.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Shame!

Mr. Edwards: For non-housing receipts the prescribed proportion will be 50 per cent. These changes should significantly reduce the pressure on the all-Wales cash limit.

Last year I gave authorities forward indications of capital allocations based on 80 per cent. and 70 per cent. for the two later years. This year I intend giving forward indications again, but linked to 80 per cent. for each year to provide a firmer basis for planning.

I turn now to the resources available for 1985-86. Gross expenditure provision underlying the cash limit for the coming year will be £349 million, marginally higher than the level of provision for the present year. When the law and order services are added the total is £354 million.

Within this figure gross provision for local authority housing is £146·5 million. Each authority will receive sufficient to cover the forward indications given them in July 1984. In addition, bids for an allocation to meet expenditure needs on privately and publicly owned prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings will be met in full. Bids for expenditure on enveloping schemes not covered by previous allocations will also be met in full. I am making provision to enable the two existing Welsh priority estates projects to continue and for a new scheme to commence.

The Housing Corporation's net capital provision will be £39 million. I expect receipts and private sector finance to enhance that total by another £3 million to £4 million.

Total resources for roads and transport, taking into account new receipts, amount to £64 million. Within this sum I have accepted just over £53 million for TSG purposes. This will enable the three new major highway projects announced in the Welsh Grand Committee last Wednesday to start in 1985.

Gross capital provision for other service blocks in 1985-86 is over £10 million higher than the projected level of spending in the current year—an increase from about £125 million to £135 million.

The enterprise zones have been given additional resources amounting to £2·3 million to further their development. In recognition of its regional status, the Polytechnic for Wales has also been given an individual allocation of £500,000 per annum over the next few years to promote its technological development.

Other allocations have been made for major coast protection works at Prestatyn, urgent refuse disposal schemes in Swansea, Rhondda and Ynys Môn, flood alleviation works in Denbigh, repairs to the Brecon and Monmouth canal, and towards the cost of replacing the headquarters of Powys county council, which have become structurally unsound.

The cash limit provision for 1985-86, which is gross spending less forecast receipts, is £249 million excluding law and order services. To calculate the total available for allocation the cash limit has added to it a proportion of housing receipts, and deducted from it estimates of expenditure not counting against allocations, such as leased vehicles and derelict land clearance. The total calculated in this way is £263 million. Of this sum about £14 million is being withheld from those district authorities which resolved to spend in excess of the voluntary restraint level for the present year. If the authorities concerned are able to realise sufficient additional receipts, all or part of the allocations withheld will be restored to them as soon as possible after the end of the present financial year. Details of allocations have been placed in the Library of the House, together with an explanatory note on the new arrangements.

I believe that the new framework for managing local authority capital spending in Wales represents a fair and reasonable compromise between the objectives of local and central government. Coupled with the level of resources that I have announced it is clear proof of the Government's desire to provide a firm foundation for a wide and effective programme of worthwhile capital schemes.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Has not the bad news been camouflaged? However, the allocation for technological development at the Polytechnic of Wales and the 80 per cent. forward indications will be welcomed. The statement can be described as being serious for housing authorities. It has grave implications for district authority powers to spend on services other than housing.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the proportion of prescribed housing capital receipts. Does not a reduction to 15 per cent. represent a £27 million cut which will restrict the use of capital receipts for housing authorities in Wales? Is not this Scrooge-like and a poor Christmas present for the Welsh authorities?

Is not this bad news when added to the loss of about £30 million of capital spending power in the next year from non-housing capital receipts? The right hon. Gentleman appears to have had a drubbing from the Treasury. Clearly the Chancellor is out of control in terms of Welsh public expenditure needs.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Association of District Councils believes that casualties are inevitable in environmental improvement schemes, tourist projects, plans for seaside towns, the building of factories, infrastructure services for the entrepreneurial industrial innovator and recreational projects? Does not private enterprise insist upon such services before it locates industries?

Does not the statement mean fewer jobs in the building and construction industries than there were when the right hon. Gentleman took office? Does not the 1983-84 gross housing expenditure, compared with the proposed figure for 1985-86, point to a £60 million reduction? Is there not a decline in real terms of 25 per cent. for 1985-86 when comparison is made with the 1979-80 gross housing capital expenditure? Does the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that the new rules will prevent overspending and

[Mr. Barry Jones]

that the midnight moratorium is a thing of the past? Are not the Welsh housing associations pottering along at only one sixth of their capacity, being prevented from making a dynamic contribution to the solution of our housing problems? Has the right hon. Gentleman not failed to give them an effective boost?

Is he aware that about 4,000 skilled building workers in Wales are now on the dole and that at least 14,000 unskilled building workers have lost their jobs since he took office? Are there not immense queues for renovation grants throughout Wales? Does he know that 39 per cent. of housing in Wales is of the pre-1919 era, especially in the south-east valleys? Is he aware that one third of these properties are in serious disrepair? South Wales has one of the worst records of homelessness of all areas in the United Kingdom and there are bleak forecasts of worse to come for teenage young and single-parent families. Local authority housing starts in 1983-84 totalled a miserable 1,500.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that his proposed funding of housing will not encourage a major attack on the problems to which I have referred? What of the backlog of housing renovation grants? Have the Government not decided, in effect, to deny themselves the chance of launching an imaginative programme of house building to the advantage both of the homeless and the jobless? This statement is a cruel disappointment. Wales will be disappointed today.

Mr. Edwards: At the beginning of his questions and later the hon. Gentleman drew attention to an important feature of what I said. He welcomed the future 80 per cent. indications and asked about mid-term moratoriums. A prime objective of the system that we are introducing and developing with local authorities is to give some certainty to local authorities so that they can plan their capital programmes over a period of years, have a degree of flexibility on cash limits and avoid both underspends and overspends from year to year and the necessity to take mid-term action. The previous Government were faced with the problem of massive underspends, giving encouragement to spend and then having to haul in the spending powers of local authorities. We have had both underspends and overspends, and the system that we are introducing will give a great deal more certainty and assurance. It will reduce greatly the risk of mid-term action.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the effect of the reduction in the prescribed limit. He appeared not to understand that the reduction has been offset by a 27 per cent. increase in net provision for housing. He has missed the relationship that exists between the allocations made to authorities and their freedom to spend their accrued receipts. Housing provision is close to last year's figure. Estimated receipts are down and we are making a realistic assumption of housing receipts. To offset that, we have substantially increased — by 27 per cent. — the net provision for housing that is funded by the Welsh Office. We are maintaining at a high level expenditure on housing through the Housing Corporation. The corporation's power to spend will be enhanced by the new financial arrangements which we have made with the private sector for that purpose.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the disrepair of the housing stock in Wales. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Labour Government whom he supported took practically no action on improvement grants. We have launched a major improvement programme which has substantially improved the condition of the housing stock. We have a 5 per cent. increase in the cash limit overall, which is above the inflation rate in Wales. We have a rising level of investment in the housing area and in the industrial sector. In addition, we have a massive road programme. That gives tremendous opportunity for the building industry in Wales in the year ahead.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, within impossibly tight constraints, and given the Treasury's obsession with the public sector borrowing requirement, to the exclusion of pretty well every other economic objective, he has had a remarkable achievement in carrying the acquiescence hitherto of most Welsh local authorities with his policies for local government financing? Will my right hon. Friend say something about the future of the urban aid programme? Is it likely to be sufficiently ample to accommodate essential redevelopment work in town centres? Is the special project school likely to be large enough to cover certain essential works?

Mr. Edwards: In introducing this system of control I have tried to avoid the stop-go process from which we suffered and to maintain a consistent and reasonably high level of spending. Welsh local authorities have benefited from the restraint that they have shown in keeping down current expenditure. In per capita terms, capital expenditure in Wales is considerably higher than the corresponding figure in England. That is a recognition of need and of the current expenditure policies that are followed by local authorities in Wales.

In the programme that I have announced there are moneys to provide £19 million in capital for the urban programme. That sum is broadly in line with what local authorities tell us they will spend this year. The urban programme also includes current expenditure and the total to be spent on the urban programme will be over £25 million. I can tell my hon. Friend that there is provision for the continuation of special project expenditure. We have good examples of notable housing improvement that has been carried out in that way at Wrexham and in the Rhondda.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Secretary of State not disguising the reality by the way that he has mischievously used statistics? Over the five years from 1979-80 to 1984-85, there was a capital investment level of £440 million per annum. Over the next three years the level will drop to £330 million per annum. That is a drop of 25 per cent. in local authority capital investment at the very time when housing, roads, schools and everything else provided by local authorities require more capital spending and not less. Will the right hon. Gentleman come clean and admit that there has been a U-turn in Government policy? Both he and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales the hon. Member for Conwy (Mr. Roberts), are on record as saying that capital receipts will be available to local authorities to make up for the lack of finances for housing, housing repairs and renovation. He and his hon. Friend are on record as saying that. There has now been a U-turn, so let the right hon. Gentleman be honest with the House and with Wales.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman's accusation is incompatible with the figures that I announced in my statement. Over the six years from 1979-80, local authorities in Wales will have invested about £2·2 billion in capital projects, and over the next three years they will be investing a further £1 billion. The hon. Gentleman's allegation was wrong.

I have already told the hon. Gentleman in my statement that local authorities increased their reserves and did not spend their receipts on housing improvement at a time when they could have done so. At that stage they were underspending. We are merely asking that they should not spend for a second time in a single year or in a short period, action which would destroy the Government's public spending programme as a whole.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It would be marvellous if we had money that we could throw about like confetti so that all the local authorities in Wales could spend it indiscriminately, but the time has come when we must be accountable to our ratepayers, and the local authorities must be good housekeepers. I am sure that Opposition Members will agree that if local authorities did not throw money away on nuclear-free zones, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and all the fringe lunatics on whom they are spending money it would be available to build more roads and houses and for the social services. I welcome my right hon. Friend's support for the redevelopment of the Cardiff docks.

Mr. Edwards: I agree with my hon. Friend about unnecessary and frivolous expenditure by local authorities, but Welsh local authorities have made a considerable effort to meet our current expenditure targets, which is one reason why the per capita expenditure that I am announcing is nearly double that in England. It is a direct result of having lower current expenditure. I should also like to make it clear to my hon. Friend that that has enabled us to meet our commitments to cover the 80 per cent. forward indications that we gave local authorities, to meet provision for prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings in full, to provide continuing enveloping schemes in Wales and to provide for the priority estates that have already been mentioned.

Mr. Coleman: May I tell the right hon. Gentleman that, despite all the flim-flam at the end of his statement, he does not put us off the scent that he is guilty of the crime of robbing local authorities of the right to spend their own money? Does not he recall his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary telling us repeatedly that the receipts from the sale of council houses would be used to build more houses? Will he say now how many houses will not be built in Wales as a result of his U-turn?

Mr. Edwards: The so-called U-turn to which the hon. Gentleman refers is that I have increased net provision to local authorities by 27 per cent. to take account of the fact that we shall have lower receipts in the year ahead.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): My right hon. Friend's references to the enveloping schemes will be welcomed in Cardiff. Last week mention was made of a child's guide to help one to understand the rate support grant settlement. May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that it would be desirable if there were a child's guide on why our local authorities may not freely spend their own capital receipts?

Mr. Edwards: The reason why local authorities in Wales may not freely spend their capital receipts is that they have already spent them once and increased their reserves by some £300 million. If they now spend all of them in a single year, that will have a significant effect on the Government's spending policies and on the level of the public sector borrowing requirement. All that I am seeking to do is to ensure that, if they spend that money for a second time they do not do it all in a single year, but in a controlled way over a period.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I wonder whether the Secretary of State, having been in office for five years, is proud of his record towards county councils and district councils in Wales? How does he think they will react once they know the contents of today's statement? I should like to ask the right hon. Gentleman three questions. What effect will today's statement have on employment in Wales? Will there be an increase in the number of houses to be built in 1985? Finally, when will the Secretary of State stand up for the people of Wales and their rights in the Cabinet?

Mr. Edwards: I believe that I have a good record with regard to local authorities in Wales. That is why they have had a good settlement for current expenditure and why we are now able to maintain a substantial capital programme. The hon. Gentleman asked about employment. The biggest single contribution to employment will be provided by the rising investment that is taking place in Wales as a result of the Government's firm control of public spending and borrowing, which is keeping interest rates down, restoring company profitability and providing jobs for the future.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I welcome the additional amount for enterprise zones and the special allocation for coastal protection works at Prestatyn, but is my hon. Friend aware that Delyn borough council has accumulated capital receipts specifically for the purpose of developing Holywell, a town ravaged by unemployment, most recently by the proposed redundancies of one third of the work force at Courtaulds greenfield, and that unless the council receives a special allocation, that desperately needed development will not go ahead?

Mr. Edwards: As my hon. Friend has recognised, his constituency has already done well out of the allocation for coastal protection and the additional amount for the enterprise zones. I have announced the continuation of a major urban programme, including the provision of urban development grant. Of course we shall consider carefully any applications submitted by his local authority.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Why does the Secretary of State for Disaster in Wales continue to try to persuade us that cuts are good for us when the news that he gave us this afternoon is evidently another slap in the face for the homeless, those on housing waiting lists and those who live in substandard accommodation? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that my constituency of Cynon Valley has the worst housing in the whole of Wales, and the second worst housing in the whole of Britain? What hope does he hold out for my constituency, with the news that he gave us this afternoon?

Mr. Edwards: I say two things to the hon. Lady—first, that the one thing that local government has said consistently over the years is that it dislikes a system of

[Mr. Edwards]

capital planning that does not enable it to plan over a period of years and involves stop-go. I am seeking to introduce a consistency that will enable local authorities to plan for the future. Secondly, the Government whom she has supported in the past did practically nothing to tackle the problem of the housing conditions in her area. This Government have undertaken a massive programme of housing improvement, and are continuing to do so through a whole range of measures.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): Is my right hon. Friend fully satisfied that, with careful administration and good housekeeping, Welsh local authorities will be able to meet their statutory obligations and fulfil the tasks that he has set them?

Mr. Edwards: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not clear that, behind all the camouflage, we have yet another chapter of cuts when the need in Wales, particularly in housing, is rising all the time? As the Secretary of State said that he was proud of his record, may I recommend to him a new year's resolution, that he makes the worst year of the Labour Government in terms of housing completions his target for his best year?

Mr. Edwards: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman refers to the Labour Government, who slashed capital expenditure on housing over a period of years. At a time when housing receipts are falling, I take credit for having increased the net provision for local authorities by 27 per cent.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will not the Secretary of State take on board the fact that the capital overspending that he talked about in his statement is the result of the need and subsequent demand for adequate housing in the valley communities? In the constituency of the Rhondda, which I represent, as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's exhortations we have one of the highest rates of owner-occupancy in the country, and 18,000 people are waiting for improvement grants. What hope can the right hon. Gentleman give those people for next year?

Mr. Edwards: The need was there when, three and four years ago, the same local authorities substantially underspent. What I am trying to do is to introduce a system that eliminates both the underspends and the overspends, and enables local authorities to spend in full the provision that is given to them. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he has one of the best examples of a priority estate project being undertaken, in his constituency.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): May I give the Secretary of State some comfort? May I welcome his decision to maintain support for the PRC improvement programme? However, does not the right hon. Gentleman appreciate and understand that the maintenance of that programme will put a further strain on the budget available for other housing sector programmes? Will the Secretary of State confirm that one of the prime justifications for the sale of council houses was the release of receipts for local authority capital programmes? Will not his decision now mean that as well as being unable to meet their existing needs, local authorities will not even have the confidence to plan for the future? Does not he realise that he has demoralised and shattered the confidence of local authorities in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: No, because I have set a prescribed limit at this level to increase the allocations to local authorities and spread them widely and to meet the commitment to provide for PRC schemes in full. I again repeat that the bids which have been made have been met in full.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the decorative parts of his statement do not disguise the fact that this is another major blow to the economy of Wales, let alone to local government, which is tired of being made a scapegoat for the failure of the Government's monetarist policies? Does he also appreciate the devastating effect that these measures will have on the building and construction industry? This industry should be providing jobs and new homes, and should be improving those homes which are so badly in need of improvement.

Has the right hon. Gentleman drawn the Treasury's attention to the report of the chief housing officers of Wales, who in a recent report forcefully pointed out that the bulk of Welsh housing will be fit only for slum clearance by the end of this century? Has he also drawn the Treasury's attention to the report of Mid-Glamorgan chief officers, who have graphically illustrated the effect which bad housing is having on health and mortality rates in their county?

Why does not the right hon. Gentleman at least admit that this is local government money which he is holding back? Does not he appreciate that by acting in this way, the Government are destroying local government, which has such a proud record in British history?

Mr. Edwards: By acting in this way I hope to avoid the kind of mid-term corrective action which local authorities rightly resent and which interferes with sensible capital planning. The hon. Gentleman referred to the so-called decorative aspects of my statement. I do not know whether he means the 27 per cent. increase in net provision — that is additional Government grant to local authorities to offset falling receipts—or whether he is criticising the fact that to meet the particular problems of Wales, and in recognition of the Welsh authorities' good record on current spending, Wales has been given about £100 million more than it would have received on the equivalent English per capita basis.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:

Michael Denzil Xavier Portillo for Enfield, Southgate.

Local Authority Capital Expenditure

5.26 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the statement made today on local authority capital expenditure in England and Wales."

I gave you, Mr. Speaker, as well as the House and the Secretary of State, as much notice as I could of my intention to raise this matter. The House has just learned of the contents of those statements which were discussed in a mood of considerable anger and dismay.

These are specific matters of crucial importance to every hon. Member and his constituents. I believe that no one would contest that. That the matter should have urgent consideration is the point that I particularly want to stress. The House listened with increasing dismay to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who made a number of statements which, in effect, were a new departure in policy, even for this Government — first, further to restrict local government control of its own money and resources; secondly, to betray the promises made to owner-occupiers and people buying older premises, particularly young married couples; and, thirdly, to betray commitments given to the building and construction industry. Commitments to the homeless and to people living in substandard accommodation have also been broken as a result of today's statements.

This is an urgent matter because local authorities will have to make immediate changes in their plans and programmes for the coming financial year. They will have to begin immediately to adjust to the new circumstances under which they are expected to operate by the Government. When I say local authorities, I mean not just housing authorities but also the capital programmes of the shire counties.

In view of the overwhelming resentment and anger displayed by the House of Commons following these statements, the House should have the opportunity to discuss the matter as soon as possible, certainly before the Christmas recess. The Secretary of State said—I think I quote his words correctly—that he was operating "under decisions of the House". The House should be given an immediate opportunity to debate the implications of his statement and to record its view before it is too late and before local authority capital expenditure programmes, the building and contruction industry and the homeless are plunged into further problems and difficulties.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the statements made today on local authority capital expenditure in England and Wales."

I am satisfied that the matter raised by the hon. Gentleman ought to be discussed under Standing Order No. 10. Has the hon. Gentleman the leave of the House?

[The pleasure of the House having been signified, the motion stood over under Standing Order No. 10 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) until the commencement of public business tomorrow.]

Arts Funding

5.30 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): After the decision which you have just made, Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic but unsure about the position tomorrow if this application is also granted.

I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the cut in funding for the arts for the coming year".

This cut was announced yesterday without warning having been given to the House and without initial notification of it to any of the Opposition parties. It is a specific matter of Government funding to which you, Mr. Speaker, have already agreed in relation to another aspect. It is of general interest to many hundreds of thousands of people outside the House and it is of specific concern to those whose livelihood depends upon the continuation of specific companies and organisations within the arts, both in theatre and music and in the museums and galleries of Great Britain.

Secondly, the importance of this matter has been stressed by many outside who do not normally object to the actions of this Government or of any other Government. Sir Peter Hall, the director of the National Theatre, has described it as a tragic day for the theatre. Sir Michael Levey, the director of the National Gallery, said:

"I am appalled and gravely perturbed by the implication of the Minister's decision. . . . A cut of such magnitude is unprecedented in recent years."

The British Museum has been taken aback by this decision. The chairman of the Arts Council, Sir William Rees-Mogg, said:

"Many of our clients, faced with grants increasingly below inflation, will find their very existence in jeopardy".

If that is not enough, when making the statement—not, I may say, in this House—the Minister for the Arts said that the award was "rather mean". It is indeed mean. It is not only mean but serious for those who are concerned with the future of the arts in Great Britain. Because of the anxiety which has been created, because we shall soon be going into recess and because of the lack of opportunity which has been given to the House to discuss the implications, I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will give sympathetic consideration to this application.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the cut in funding for the arts for the coming year".

I have listened with care to what the hon. Member has said, but I regret that I do not consider the matter which he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Later——

5.39 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I fully understood your reasons for not accepting the Standing Order No. 10 application of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan). In your capacity as someone who protects the interests of the House, particularly the interests of Back Benchers,

[Mr. Tony Banks]

will you say something helpful about the repeated occurrence of major Government announcements on the arts taking place outside the Chamber? No Minister with responsibility in this Chamber comes to the Dispatch Box to give us the opportunity of perhaps mauling the Minister with responsibility for the arts in much the same way as we were able to maul the Secretary of State for the Environment. You gave way to the application under Standing Order No. 10 on that matter but you were not prepared to give way to the application under Standing Order No. 10 on the arts.

Mr. Speaker: "To give way" is an unfortunate phrase to use. I exercise my discretion in the matter. I fully understand that the arts are important. We have questions on the arts and there has been some discussion of whether sufficient time is given to that. But, if the hon. Gentleman reflects, he will see that he will have opportunities, perhaps before the House rises, to raise the matter.

Mr. Buchan: Further to the point of order of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), Mr. Speaker. May I make a point that I was unable to make under Standing Order No. 10? On this occasion a separate Department announced its public expenditure for the year. We have just had a lengthy set of exchanges when another Department announced its public expenditure for the year. Yet in the case of the arts, which is dealt with by a separate Department, a written statement is made by a Minister in another place, accompanied by a parallel statement by someone speaking on his behalf in the House. No announcement was made to the House and no warning was given. Nothing would have been known about it had I not phoned the appropriate Department because of a rumour that I heard.

Therefore, it is necessary that the arts, which are profoundly important to many millions of people in Britain, should have their rightful place in the House. I know that this is a monetarist Government but they should not seek to prove themselves to be a philistine Government as well.

I hope that you, Sir, will defend our rights and ensure that that is done. Unless pressure can be brought to bear upon the Government, either by yourself or the House, to come forward with an opportunity in January, we shall have no opportunity to discuss this important statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that it is generally accepted in the House that I do my best to protect the rights of the House and its Members. Where statements are made is not a matter for me.

Civil Aviation Bill

5.34 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In Committee this morning on the Civil Aviation Bill the Government, for the second time in a week, failed to carry their own sittings motion. May I take this opportunity—it is the only one I have—to ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether or not he now intends to proceed with the Bill and, if so, when? In doing so, would the Secretary of State bear in mind that it is apparent from the decisions of the Committee at its two previous sittings——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say that he was asking the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman should be asking me.

Mr. Snape: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. How on earth I could have confused the Secretary of State with you I do not know. May I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether you have received any intimation from the Secretary of State regarding how the Government intend to proceed with the Bill, since it is apparent from the two sittings of the committee that there is no majority upon it for the Bill as it stands. I and other hon. Members on both the Labour and Liberal benches are entitled to ask what the Government intend to do. I cannot of course speak for the opposition on the Conservative benches.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not what occurred a failure on the part of the Committee of Selection to reflect the will of the House? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not raise a point of order with me about what goes on in the Committee of Selection.

Mr. Jessel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to that point of order. What remedy is available to the House when the House has decided by a large majority in favour of the Bill on Second Reading—in this case 232 to 154 votes, which is a ratio of 60 to 40 in favour of the Bill —and the Committee of Selection then unknowingly appoints a Committee which is against the Bill? How can the interests of the House be protected?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the point of order from the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), might it not be for the convenience of the House if one of my right hon. Friends — either the Secretary of State for Transport or the Leader of the House — were to make a statement that the Bill will be withdrawn pending a debate on the Floor of the House about airports policy and pending a decision in the light of that debate by the Secretary of State for Transport, taking into consideration the findings of the airports policy report? If not, will not the Secretary of State be prejudicing his quasi-judicial capacity?

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is not the difficulty due to the fact that the inspector's report on airports policy was published a few days after the Second Reading in this House and that the Standing Committee is reflecting the resulting confusion that has arisen over the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial position? May I therefore support the

point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) in believing that the right and better course for the House as a whole would be the withdrawal of the Bill at this stage?

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not a member of the Committee which is considering the Bill. I voted against its Second Reading. The points which my hon. Friends have made are important. I should have thought that they would be of benefit to the Secretary of State. Certain hon. Members may be uncertain whether the Bill is or is not linked with Stansted. I think that most of those who have studied the matter recognise that it is linked with Stansted and believe that the House ought to drop the Bill until a decision on Stansted has been reached by the Government.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely it is unprecedented for a Standing Committee to fail to approve the sittings motion at two meetings. This in itself is worthy of considerable comment. Is not the truth of the matter that, since the House of Commons gave approval to the Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill, certain events have taken place and reports have been published which have led to a fundamental reappraisal of the principle of the Bill? Is it not therefore essential for the Leader of the House and his colleagues to consider whether or not the time has come to withdraw the Bill and introduce more appropriate legislation?

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): Perhaps it might help the House in the difficulty which has been created for it by a Bill which has been given a Second Reading by a large majority, although the Committee appointed to consider it has not yet seen fit to begin its consideration, if I were to seek to make a statement about it either tomorrow or the next day, and certainly before the House rises for the Christmas recess. The matter requires a certain amount of consideration. I should like to ask for your leave, Mr. Speaker, to make a statement in due course.

Mr. Speaker: I think we should leave the matter there.

BILL PRESENTED

MILK (CESSATION OF PRODUCTION) BILL

Mrs. Peggy Fenner, supported by Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. Peter Rees and Mr. John MacGregor presented a Bill to provide for payments to be made for the purpose of compensating persons, who are or have been registered in the direct sales register or a wholesale register maintained under the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984, for discontinuing milk production and to make provision in connection with payments to such persons whenever made: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 46.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the questions on the three motions relating to the statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Local Government (Interim Provisions) (Consultation) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1760) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agriculture and Horticulture Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984 (S.I., No. 1922) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Farm and Horticulture Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1924) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 (Amendment)

5.42 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 to compensate investors with licensed dealers.

The Bill is directed at licensed dealers in shares, a growing sector of the market in shares. There are, governing licensed dealers, nine associations which constitute self-regulatory bodies.

Last year the Department of Trade and Industry tightened up the regulations governing licensed dealers in shares. Nevertheless, in spite of that the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for corporate and consumer affairs, admitted to me in recent correspondence that the present statutory framework could be improved and extended and that is what the Bill is about.

For a number of reasons it is necessary to protect investors with licensed dealers in shares against fraud, bankruptcy or mismanagement, by setting up a compensation fund to provide for their losses in those events. It is necessary in this case because the risks that the would-be small investor with licensed dealers in shares can face are many.

First, it is difficult for a recipient of a cold call—an unsolicited telephone call — to know whether the supposed licensed dealer is respectable. Whether he is a member of one of the proper associations and has a licence.

It is also difficult to know in what kind of trading in shares the company engage. There is a danger that a company may take a worthless share at an artificial price and set up a company abroad, say in the United States or on the continent, and push the price up by hiking up the shares in the foreign market. That creates an artificial market in Britain. That is a fraudulent manipulation of shares, yet the practice occurs. It is not clear whether the Department of Trade and Industry investigates and controls such actions rigorously enough.

Let us take Ravendale, for example. That company is owned by Mr. Singh, the second largest licensed dealer in Britain. He forged the transatlantic ties with Marsan Securities, a New York brokerage house, which, as *The Observer* and the Securities and Exchange Commission subsequently revealed, was a distinctly unsavoury concern. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has expressed great anxiety about trading between Ravendale and Marsan Securities. The Department of Trade and Industry, in a letter to me, claimed to have carried out an investigation, but just how rigorous it was and what form it took remains unclear.

Before Marsan ceased business, it promoted Ravendale sponsored shares and Ravendale, in turn, marketed Marsan favourites. Ravendale's offshoot, the London Venture Capital Market, planned the unlisted securities market placing of shares in Video Turf, owner of the rights to a horse race gaming machine. Camseal, Video Turf's parent, had disturbing associations with individuals connected with Signal Life and the Cavendish Life frauds. In the event, Video Turf never came to market. Camseal collapsed and recently the shares were quoted at a mere 25 cents. They were formerly valued at $30 million.

Other allegations have been made against Mr. Singh and Ravendale by the Checkpoint programme. Those include connections between Mr. Singh and Thomas F. Quinn, a disbarred American lawyer imprisoned for stock fraud. He is believed to have connections with the Mafia.

Chartwell Securities AG, a company with which Thomas F. Quinn appears to be intimately associated, and Zurich and Trafalgar Capital (UK) owned by one Neil Bruckman, appeared to be acting in concert to manipulate a market in shares. Abraham Margolis was a major shareholder in Ravendale Securities. He and his brother, Robbie Margolis, according to the FBI, are associates of the Mafia.

That is just a small part of the complex activities of Ravendale. But to the small investor, as the recent Checkpoint programme showed, it appeared to be a respectable firm of stockbrokers. Such firms advertise in the national press and sometimes the names chosen—for example the London Venture Capital Market — make them seem solid and respectable. They issue glossy brochures, and, as I said, they sometimes contact people cold, which is illegal and entice them to part with their money, sometimes to their loss. The Checkpoint programme recently featured a Mr. Dunstan, a disabled man who has lost all his savings.

The Bill is designed to fill a gap in the legislation by providing a compensation fund for investors with licensed dealers to reimburse them if funds have been lost either because rules have been broken or ignored, because of commercial misjudgment or because the company concerned has collapsed.

The collapse of Norton Warburg in 1981 showed the necessity for compensation. More than 500 investors suddenly discovered that the five companies in which they had invested through Norton Warburg had lost nearly £4·7 million.

The Government are determined to encourage small shareholders even if, as in the case of British Telecom, it means selling shares to them at half price. If that is the Government's aim, they must be prepared to protect small investors in the circumstances that I have described. The tightened rules for licensed dealers introduced in 1983 go part of the way. Even the Gower report points out the necessity for a compensation fund. This part of the market is growing. The privatisation of British Telecom has meant that many small investors have gone to licensed dealers because their investments are too small for a stockbroker's attention. Some licensed dealers have made a killing out of BT shares. One has carried out £18 million worth of trading so far. If that is the position, the associations of licensed dealers should be obliged to set up a compensation fund. It would probably be sensible to have just one association rather than the present nine. Setting up such a fund would not be so prohibitively expensive now as it was in the past due to recent change in the rules, forcing the separation of clients' money and investments from the firms' other money.

If the Government are determined to encourage small investors they must be prepared to ensure that the small investor is properly protected and that the part of the market in which small investors deal is properly regulated and controlled.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Oonagh McDonald, Mr. Kevin McNamara, Mr. Robert Hughes, Mr. Stewart

Randall, Mr. Stewart Bell, Mr. Jim Callaghan, Mr. Derek Foster, Mr. Frank Dobson, Mr. Harry Cowans, Mr. Jack Straw, Mr. John McWilliam and Mr. Robin Corbett.

PREVENTION OF FRAUD (INVESTMENTS) ACT 1958 (AMENDMENT)

Dr. Oonagh McDonald accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 to compensate investors with licensed dealers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 47.]

ESTIMATES DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]—*considered*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1984-85

Class IV, Vote 5

Industrial Support (Department of Energy)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a supplementary sum not exceeding £45,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in the course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1985 for expenditure by the Department of Energy in connection with the energy industries including related research and development, selective assistance to industry, energy conservation, oil storage, and certain other services including grants in aid and an international subscription. —*[Mr. Buchanan-Smith.]*

5.52 pm

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): Last, but not I think least, we come to energy. The Select Committee on Energy and I as its Chairman are grateful to the House and to the Liaison Committee for the opportunity to discuss the issues raised by our report on the £45 million allocated to the financing of BNOC in the winter Supplementary Estimates.

Before dealing with the report, I wish to thank very warmly the members and staff of my Committee for the stupendous efforts that they made to complete and publish a report within 15 days of the decision to make the inquiry. In my view, that very creditable achievement conceals two things. First, we were unable to take evidence, as we would have wished, from a number of other significant witnesses such as the recipients of the letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As Chairman of a Select Committee which has always sought to base its conclusions very firmly on the evidence, I believe that that fully justifies our first conclusion—that if the spirit of Standing Order No. 19 is to be observed the Government should not put this kind of pressure on Select Committees. Secondly, the Government have yet again refused to disclose important evidence which in my judgment could have been disclosed without prejudicing commercial confidence. This may limit the report, but I do not believe that it invalidates our conclusions.

Two documents are especially relevant. The first is the Government's letter to the oil companies in August this year. A summary of that document, still marked "confidential", disclosed nothing of interest or importance but in my judgment it is clear that the letter influenced both BNOC and the oil industry's actions. I shall return to that later. The second document, which I requested after my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had mentioned its existence in his evidence, was a review of oil price policy carried out by the Department. Our Clerk was advised that this was "advice to Ministers" and an "internal working document" and could not be provided.

Technically, Select Committees have power to send for papers and persons, but it seems that our power to send for persons is significantly greater than our power to send for papers. That being so, I believe that the discharge of our responsibility to Parliament and to the nation is becoming seriously deficient in a significant respect. We could have been shown those papers—in confidence, if necessary—

[Mr. Ian Lloyd]

but we have not seen them. They might even have vindicated the Government's position completely, although I doubt it. Certainly I believe that our suspicions will be justified long before the year 2014. My conclusion is, however, that the rule should be redefined to reflect the present reality—in other words, that Select Committees have power to send for persons and for any papers except those which the Government of the day consider too important or sensitive to be disclosed. All Governments would find that convenient and it defines the real limits to our power. It also seriously limits our ability to provide Parliament and the nation with a second opinion on its affairs which has real value and relevance. I believe that that is a matter for the House as a whole.

As regards the issues involved in the report, the inquiry began in April 1983 when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was Secretary of State for Energy and gave important evidence to us on oil prices. At that time, there was no immediate prospect of BNOC making losses. The memorandum on the subject from the Department of Energy was quite specific. It stated:

"Neither B.N.O.C. nor the Government can intervene in the pricing of North Sea oil in defiance of market forces and the underlying changes in the pattern of energy use and consumer behaviour".

The memorandum continued, saying that BNOC would not have to make frequent price changes and that it would build up "long-term relationships" with its customers and agree prices which

"reflected their longer-run commitments of interest".

We were told that the Department itself did not make short-term forecasts, disliked and sought to avoid "sharp and sudden changes" in the price of oil, considered that

"our interests, overall, were not the same as O.P.E.C."

and argued that price stability in the short term

"depends very much on O.P.E.C. agreeing and adhering to restrictive production programmes."

The then Secretary of State confirmed the position in a most important evidence session, the conclusions of which marked the beginning of the present inquiry. I shall mention just three. First, he said:

"B.N.O.C. are price-takers, not price-setters . . . must interpret market signals . . . and cannot stand in the way of market forces".

Secondly, he said that while seeking "stability" the Government allow the companies

"to produce as much as they like"

and make no attempt

"to control the price".

Thirdly, he said:

"it is not the case that I, having any idea or view on what the world price of oil is, seek to try to use B.N.O.C. as an instrument to achieve that price. Nothing like that at all".

What, then, is the reality? The evidence since April 1983, as my Committee and I see it, seems to point in exactly the opposite direction. The Government now derive so much of their revenue — comparatively painlessly to themselves, if not to the final consumer—from oil or from the North sea, that their loud protestations of unconcern about price levels simply do not square with their actions. They are not concerned merely with the suddenness or sharpness of any change in direction. Indeed, they seem to me to be almost obsessed with the consequences of what they fear most, which I would define—and I believe that they would define—as the collapse of the highly artificial price structure inflicted on the world by OPEC at a time when we produced no oil and had virtually no short-term options open to us. The apparent permanence of that price structure has been converted by that remarkable mechanism, the market, into a worldwide response of immense power and significance. The production of non-OPEC oil has boomed. The North sea has boomed. The Government's tax revenues have boomed.

The figures for tax revenue are noteworthy. For all the years to May 1979, the figure was £970 million. For the period from May 1979 to this year, it was £29 million. The community still pays much the same price as it paid to OPEC. It is the beneficiaries who have changed. Whatever the national interest may be—and it is debatable—no one can deny a vast overlap of interest between the Treasury and OPEC In 1984, the Treasury's tax take from the North sea was £22 billion gross and £16 billion net, after allowing for related imports, interest, dividends and repayments of capital.

The scale of the national dilemma may be gleaned from the fact that in 1983 the trading profits from all United Kingdom companies amounted to £56 billion, of which North sea companies alone accounted for £15·6 billion.

OPEC makes no bones about its views. At this moment it may be making them plain — for all I know — in Geneva. It is we who equivocate about our views. OPEC stated not long ago that its policy was to

"regulate and determine oil prices".

It believes in holding prices when demand is falling and in raising them when demand is rising. It believes that the purpose of its oil revenues is to finance the industrial transition and restructuring of its members' economies. It believes that its members would be appalled by a price collapse and must refrain above all from "competition in prices".

The demonstration of those views and that interest has been the steady decline of OPEC output from a peak of over 50 million barrels a day to some 16 million barrels now. OPEC believes that it remains in its interests to sell a small quantity at a higher price rather than a larger quantity at a low price. An OPEC think tank has stated openly:

"Competitive discounting has no theoretical floor above the marginal cost of production"

and:

"Economic recovery will *not* cause a commensurate increase in oil demand".

The House might be interested to know why that is so. In 1978-81, the energy used per unit of gross domestic product in the OECD area fell by 8 per cent., but the oil component of that energy fell by 24 per cent.

So much for OPEC. I have already summarised what we ourselves have said. What we do, however, is different. Broadly speaking, our policy response to the situation has been twofold. Under the OPEC umbrella we have created a significant domestic oil capacity. Much, but not all, of that capacity is dependent on OPEC price levels. When he was Secretary of State for Energy, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor stated in evidence to us that North sea fields would not go out of business at a low price. He said:

"obviously . . . there is an oil price at which they would not be profitable, but it is a very low price indeed".

That was a most significant statement. The Brown Book itself discloses that the average cost of production of oil in the North sea is in fact $10 a barrel. That judgment was confirmed by a recent analysis supplied by Professors

Kemp and Rose which estimated the development costs for some 23 new oilfields in the North sea with a total reserve of 2·6 billion barrels.

For fields of more than 250 million barrels, the cost would be $6 per barrel. For fields of more than 100 million barrels, the cost would be $7 per barrel. For fields producing over 50 million barrels — the most uneconomic to develop — the cost would be $10 per barrel. Anticipated operating costs are $12 per barrel for the larger fields and $17 for the smaller. The margin, therefore, remains very large. The parties that are interested in those margins are not the oil companies but the Government who tax them, either for development in the middle east, or, in the west, to satisfy the insatiable public expenditure budgets.

The position is summarised in a remarkable table published by Shell for 1982. Of the $62 received from a typical OPEC barrel in western Europe, $52 disappears in Government revenue—$33 to OPEC and $19 to other Governments. For the North sea, as I have said, the proportion is even higher—somewhere between 85 and 90 per cent. at the margin, though the percentage varies with the field and the location.

OPEC stands to lose $7·4 billion for every fall of $1 in the price of a barrel. I have been unable to find out what the United Kingdom figure is, but it is certainly proportionate.

Those are the real forces at work. That is the scene in which, so we were told, in some mystical and undisclosed combination, in a sort of immaculate co-determination, the Government and BNOC strove desperately not to influence the price of oil—which they tell us they have neither the power nor the wish to do—but to achieve that equally mystical objective, stability. Over and over again, the word "stability" appears in the evidence. Both Lord Croham and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State declared that stability is the goal. How does one achieve stability without exercising a direct influence on the market? And how does one exercise that influence without influencing either supply or price? Politicians may know, but, for once, the economists are speechless.

It is clear from BNOC's recent evidence that a deliberate decision was made to hold the BNOC price above the spot market. BNOC feared that the market was misguided, and that it might collapse and never recover. That is OPEC's view. Lord Croham was quite frank. He stated that North sea output levels were a matter for the Government but that BNOC accepted the Government's view that

"any sharp fall in oil prices would be detrimental to North Sea development"

and that, if prices fell,

"other things might collapse".

He added, however, that the European system of price support was designed to keep oil prices

"permanently above what is a competitive price".

Made by a former head of the Civil Service, that is a most authoritative statement. It is also very frank. I submit that it defines a reality that is fundamentally different from that which the Government, in their evidence, sought to imply. The reality involved BNOC in supporting the price and the market, created the losses, ensured that BNOC would have to come to Parliament for money and confirmed that it must have acted on instructions from the Government.

In his turn, my right hon. Friend was most disarming. He denied Lord Croham's conclusion. He reminded me very much of a bishop in a confessional. If he is to be considered human and truthful, he must disclose something. However, he dare not disclose anything of real significance that might totally destroy his authority in the pulpit. My right hon. Friend, too, sheltered behind the shield of "stability" — that overworked and jaded criterion that has concealed the true objectives of every cartel throughout the ages, whether or not it has been supported by a Government. However, my right hon. Friend added that there were "special factors". There always are. What distinguishes a market from a bureaucracy is that the former accepts and responds at once to special factors. The latter dislikes them intensely, attributes them to Machiavellian forces and wishes that they would go away and allow the plan to be fulfilled as if the special factors had never arisen.

What we discovered, and now know, is that the interference did not work. The price continued to fall and the taxpayer had to pick up the bill. Moreover, we suspect that the bill will be larger—much larger—unless a few of the realities which I have outlined are accepted, and quickly. That is the background to what I believe to be my Committee's most central and significant conclusion. Perhaps I might remind the House of its terms. It said:

"The Committee believes that the distinction drawn between promoting stability and resistance to market forces is an artificial one. We find it hard to believe from the evidence of the past year or so that the Government has not taken the view that a certain price level for oil is desirable in the national interest and that it attempts to intervene in the market, as any other body with a considerable vested interest would, to secure that price."

On that rests essentially all that follows.

We need a much wider debate than this Estimate allows. The debate should include the future of BNOC and the framework within which it has to operate, whether the national interest as a whole is best served by high or low oil prices, high or low energy prices, the energy development scenarios which might follow one set of oil price policies or the other, and the cost to the west of any formal or informal support of the present OPEC/North sea cartel arrangements.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned several factors in regard to the Government's policy but has omitted a significant one—the level of output. Does his Committee take a view on the current level of output from the North sea, which is about 2·5 million barrels a day?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that my Committee would take a view on the current level of output if it considered the matter. What has impressed us far more is the fundamental change in the composition of the world output of oil, during the past 10 years. OPEC occupied about two thirds of a columnar illustration at the beginning of the decade whereas it now occupies just a little more than the top one third. The North sea is a significant factor in that change but the most significant is the decline of 10 billion barrels a day in world demand and the greater decline of 13 billion barrels a day in OPEC output.

I believe that we have blown the top off this can of complexity, half truths, secret initiatives and economic distortion which is disguised by some of the world's most powerful pressure groups as expressions of unqualified public interest. If, as I believe, the world's oil industry has responded to the OPEC price level by creating—very much to its credit—a massive alternative supply system, we should at least discuss whether and how the nation, or

[Mr. Lloyd]

the west as a whole, is to receive the full benefits of that and whether and to what extent OPEC will react in the short, medium and long term. There is a significant rather than a negligible overlap of interests between us and OPEC. We should also discuss how we can avoid a recurrence of the serious cartel exploitation which occurred in the 1960s and the 1970s. This must be an open and continuing debate. We have established the bridgehead. It is up to the House and the country, if I might put it this way, to follow through with an armoured division of debate and analysis. Nothing less will do.

6.10 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) on his introduction of his Select Committee's report. Many of us agree that this might not be the most appropriate time to debate that report—it justifies a separate debate. I should like to address myself to the dominant issue in the energy industry with regard to public cost—the current miners' strike.

We are told that the Government's case in the dispute is the need to close uneconomic pits. There are three levels of argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I shall be interested to see how the hon. Gentleman relates his speech to the Estimates.

Mr. Strang: I have had advice to the effect that it would be possible to refer to the coal industry in this debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. A passing reference is one thing, but choosing the dispute in the coal industry as the theme of a speech is quite another.

Mr. Strang: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall therefore make a rather modified speech. If you are telling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is not possible to refer to the coal industry in a debate on the Estimates, I shall take your advice, but that is not the advice that I have been given.

We are talking about public expenditure and the Department of Energy. Oil, gas and coal are crucially important but our most important energy resource is coal. We should therefore concern ourselves with the cost of its production. Bearing in mind the fact that there has not been one special debate on the coal mining strike——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have told the hon. Gentleman that it is in order to make a passing reference to the coal industry by way of analogy but he must not make the dispute the theme of his speech. The House is considering Estimates that relate to BNOC and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will direct his remarks to them.

Mr. Strang: Well, I should therefore like to draw a comparison between the case for oil and the case for coal. It is right to consider the level of North sea oil production. As the hon. Member for Havant said, bearing in mind the huge world market for oil, Britain could be considered a factor in determining the world price of oil. As we are concerned about the economics of oil production as opposed to other forms of energy, it is right to examine the costs involved. I hope that it will be possible for me to refer in passing to the cost of coal production.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I have different opinions about what he may refer to. I hope that he will have regard to what I have already told him at least twice.

Mr. Strang: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems that the earlier advice which I received from a good source——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are many seats in this place but there is only one Chair.

Mr. Strang: I am happy to make it absolutely clear that in no way am I challenging your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For that reason I shall conclude by saying that the case for oil is strong but oil must be considered in the overall context of energy production and supply. It is nonsense to debate these issues without taking account of the fundamental economic and social costs. I make that point without considering just one commodity of production. Whether talking about oil or gas production, or any form of energy production, we must recognise that the economic costs differ. That is a crucial argument to consider not only in an energy debate on North sea oil but in an economic debate in general.

We often do not recognise that the accountancy value of one aspect of production differs greatly from the economic value in terms of fixed overhead costs, fixed costs for pension schemes and, above all, social costs and consequences. Whether discussing North sea oil—this morning the Minister of State spoke about North sea oil in the Scottish Grand Committee—or other sources of energy production, the tragedy is that we are not giving sufficient weight to the huge amount of social damage that occurs as a consequence of mass unemployment in many of our communities.

6.22 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): The House will wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) and all the members of the Select Committee on Energy on a remarkably lucid report, produced with great speed and efficiency. I warmly join in those congratulations. I intervene in this debate with some hesitation because I am not a member of that Committee, but I should like to direct the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to certain points.

I shall consider the genesis of the British National Oil Corporation, which is entirely a trading body, trading in crude oil. When the Government decided to keep the BNOC trading arm as a separate body, it was not originally intended that it should become an instrument for shaping North sea oil prices, let alone for establishing an official British North sea oil price. BNOC was kept on at the time it was decided to split the original corporation and to prepare for privatisation — the upstream exploration development production division which subsequently became Britoil—to ensure security of supply. It was thought that that would be the simplest way of establishing security of supply. It was argued — perhaps that argument seems a little remote now — that it was essential to have an instrument which would work and be acceptable and which, if there were a third oil shock and another huge interruption in oil supplies internationally, could assure supplies from British producers to British consumers and the refineries. Some argued that security of supply could be achieved in another way, and a great

deal of debate has occurred on that subject. There are difficulties associated with the EEC and the treaty of Rome.

I have wished all along that there should be no such organisation to fix prices, and even today I do not believe that it would be wise to have a body that appears to be the source of an official price or even a single price which people the world over, including OPEC leaders, see as an official price. I believe that we should have adhered closely to that view. In considering participation agreements and the purchasing and selling of large volumes of crude oil, BNOC should be a price taker and not a price giver or maker. That fact should be clearly established in international oil markets and understood, especially by Governments of other oil-producing countries.

The reason we were so worried about the danger that could occur was obvious. If it became apparent that Britain had an official oil price, it would follow that that price could be manipulated. We feared that people would come to London saying, "Why do not the British Government do something about the official oil price, because that would help us with other manipulations on the world market?" Events have justified that fear, because that is exactly what has happened. It is ironic that one of the greatest free-world oil producers, the United States—admittedly, not a vast exporter, but nevertheless a huge producer and therefore decisive in the world oil market—has no national oil corporation. It therefore is not lambasted, squeezed and pushed by the world's oil diplomats in the alleged interests of maintaining price stability. We envisaged that danger.

BNOC's involvement with prices has not evolved in the way originally intended. That would be a sufficient danger, but we seem to face an even greater danger. It is believed that BNOC should not only be concerned with shaping North sea prices but take up a positive position in response to consultation with Government about stabilising the world crude oil price. That bold first step is fraught with danger, and I say that not with hindsight but because I have believed it for a long time.

The Select Committee has already sought to elucidate how the consultation—I put it no more strongly than that—was arranged, so that BNOC, whose officials are familiar with the world market and, given the circumstances in which they operate, have conducted themselves with extreme skill, felt compelled to move further into the vast world of oil pricing to take up an active position to stabilise world oil prices. That is what BNOC appeared to do in the summer. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will explain what really happened but that appeared to be the Government's requirement of BNOC. That function differed from the originally correct purpose and function of BNOC.

It would be unwise if BNOC has not only become generally involved in price shaping of North sea crude oil prices but tried to take a stance on price fixing in world oil markets. The reasons why that is unwise are obvious. It will not work. Obviously, British oil production is only a tiny proportion of world oil production. Vast forces and trends are at work in the world oil market which, frankly, ride right over and stand well away from anything that can be done with North sea prices or volumes. The oil markets worldwide have, for 100 years, barring only the gap of the past 14 years, faced the fact that there is too much oil.

For at least 18 months or two years, it has been certain that there would be a continuing softening of oil prices as attempts by the OPEC cartel to maintain the extremely high political and artificial levels of the early 1980s were progressively weakened. I do not believe that that will lead to a collapse in oil prices, but I believe that we shall see the operation of the type of forces that operated at the end of the 1970s. In those days, oil was priced at between $12 and $14 a barrel. Grossing that figure for inflation since then, the price per barrel would be about $25—probably $3 or $4 below the present price.

It has been widely expected by those who try to watch the oil markets that the price would move in that direction. It was optimistic at best and imprudent at worst for BNOC to try to prevent that happening. Any move which might, at first, lead to trying to hang on to a price and then have to give way gives one the worst of all worlds. It would be worse than doing nothing in the first place. It is a great pity if that is the sequence of events.

That is the first reason why it was not the best thing for BNOC, on the basis of consultation, to try to move into the sphere of world oil prices. It was not going to work.

The second reason is that BNOC was bound to lose money. That view was widely held and it is what has happened. I understand that the loss is at the rate of £15 million a month, and that is also a pity. I join the Select Committee in urging careful thought before any further developments are allowed which will lead to further losses of that size.

The third reason has to do with international diplomacy. For BNOC to get into a posture where it might give the impression, or in which my right hon. and hon. Friends might give the impression, that they could do something decisively to influence oil prices was dangerous, because they cannot. Except in the short term, that cannot be done. A friend refused may be a friend annoyed, but a friend misled is an angry friend. It does not surprise me that harsh words have come from OPEC about North sea price changes being ill-judged and ill-timed, the more so because OPEC leaders have claimed—I do not know whether this is only a claim or whether there is more substance to it—that they were under the impression that something could be done to hold the price and that it would be held, when of course it could not be and was not.

The Government's policy does not seem—it would not be wise—to be to control the volume of North sea oil production. The Varley assurances given by the former right hon. Member for Chesterfield have been extended, and the successful regime which we run in the North sea is one in which there has been an understanding that there will be no direct interference with production.

Any impression that may have been given—I hope that it was not—that we could and would influence the price, was a mistake. That would have led to worse relations with the Arab OPEC countries than if there had been a candid explanation at the outset that we had no control over the volume or price of North sea oil, and that we were price takers and not price givers. I always tried for candour with the Arab countries when I was involved with these matters in government.

The fourth reason why price influencing is a dangerous and unwise matter to become involved in, is that it is not entirely in our interests for oil prices to stay locked at the $29 range for Arab light or $30 for North sea crudes. I agree with those who say that, if the price collapsed to $10 or $15, it would create great international instability and

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considerable problems for this country, but modest falls to the price at which I believe it will settle—the $25 range — would do no harm to this nation or European economies. As he watches the American growth rate ease a little in 1984-85, Mr. Paul Volcker urges western Europe's economies, I believe rightly, to go for some kind of boost. There could be no better boost and no healthier development for European economies, including this country's exports and jobs, than a modest drop in crude oil prices to about $25. That assumes, of course, that the dollar does not collapse. I know that that is a bold assumption, but it is one with which we must work for the time being.

Even if we had the power to do so, which it turns out we do not, there is no broad economic argument in favour of trying to stabilise oil prices in the national interest at the artificially high levels which prevailed until the summer and early autumn of this year.

The argument on the other side is the one that comes through in some of the examinations that the Select Committee has conducted so assiduously and it is heard in a number of discussions about oil prices outside the House. It is that, if the BNOC trading body in London does not intervene in some way in oil pricing, there will be a world collapse of oil prices. That is what the OPEC Ministers say, but they would say that, wouldn't they? We must see through some of the observations, which are part of an understandable attempt to preserve certain interests, about what would cause a collapse in oil prices.

There is still a strong underlying demand for crude oil on the world market. It is not as strong as it was in the late 1970's because of the large increase in conservation and the way that energy has been designed out of a vast range of products. A sensible judgement would point to the oil price stabilising, as I said earlier, at about the mid-20s for the dollar price of oil. We should not be bluffed by the fear that there will be a collapse in oil prices. We should concentrate instead on North sea oil production and pricing, in our own interests.

There are those who say that it is easy to talk about that, but that we must consider Treasury revenues, and remember that they are essential to the Government's overall medium-term financial strategy, and to the Chancellor to enable him to find room for tax cuts or other job creation measures. That, of course, is a separate debate and not one for the House this afternoon.

I had the opportunity to tell the House two or three weeks ago that it was my view that the Chancellor's £1·5 billion available for next year could be within the range of £3 billion or more, not least because of the dollar oil revenues, and because I happen to believe that he has more room within the medium-term financial strategy than previously revealed.

That view has now been confirmed by a series of Treasury leaks over the weekend. We have now all been informed that £3 billion is more likely to be available for tax cuts, national insurance contribution cuts, and help for community enterprise and so on. I welcome that. I see a real prospect for a vigorous assault on unemployment in the new labour market conditions coming in the spring, partly financed by oil revenues.

Most of those revenues are already in the pipeline, by virtue of the 1984 production. I do not believe that fears about the oil price slipping from $30 to $27 or $26 for North sea oil or from $29 to $25 for Arab light would endanger that strategy in any way. If anything, it might enhance the strategy because it would lead to accelerated economic growth in Europe generally, including Great Britain, which would raise tax revenues and provide even more room for the Chancellor to operate in. None of those dangers stands up.

The worries that have led to the view that it would be in some way terrible if BNOC did not involve itself in trying to stabilise world prices are unfounded. There is one danger only which might lead to a major oil price collapse —if BNOC tried desperately to hang on to the existing oil price and then found, as it has already found to some extent, that it could not do so and that it did not work. That would infuriate—it may already have done so—other OPEC producers. In the end the attempt must be abandoned, BNOC must give way, and the position is more unstable and destabilised than it would have been if BNOC had not involved itself in the first place.

I understand the difficulties facing my right hon. and hon. Friends about having a British national oil corporation which must enter into price negotiations, and about having to explain to OPEC leaders and other world oil producers that we have no official price.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The right hon. Gentleman has not mentioned in his list of consequences the effect of a $25 price on the pound. I mention that neutrally.

Mr. Howell: A good deal of the effect has been discounted. One must consider the relationship between the dollar, the pound, the deutschmark and the yen. The pound may come down in relation to the deutschmark and the yen, which would be a good thing and would make it more favourable for us to join the European monetary system. The dollar would not make much difference to us. I expect that the dollar will come down a little and that the pound will come down with it, but that the deutschmark and yen will strengthen. Because the oil world believes that the price will be $25, most of that has been discounted.

I understand the Government's difficulties and the desire of BNOC not to appear to be in the lead in terms of raising prices, which was the problem two or three years ago when I was involved in the matter, or setting the pace in a vicious spiral of collapse. That is threatened by OPEC, but I do not believe that it is a serious danger. That leads me to the conclusions to which the Select Committee was heading in its lucid report.

If BNOC is to continue as an organisation, it should stick to the simplest rule of pricing. That is, it should try to buy and establish contracts as near as possible to prevailing spot market prices that month and to sell them at the same price, instead of getting caught in elaborate contracts as a buyer and having to sell on spot markets when those to whom it was to sell, walk away. It would be wise for the Government, having learned their lesson, to stand well back from consultations that lead to BNOC doing things in an attempt to influence world oil market prices, which would not and could not work and which would be bound to lose it money and friends. We should return to a matter which I pressed when I was a member of the Government and which I have raised since: that is, we should see whether we can get our security of supply by completely different arrangements, and do away with BNOC.

6.42 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I congratulate the Select Committee on Energy on its report, which has raised an important question. As the Chairman of that Committee, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd), said, the question needs to be more widely discussed than the debate can allow. We are debating the most important, dynamic element in the British economy, yet we identify a significant flaw in the Government's attitude towards it. To put it more strongly, the Government do not have a clear idea what their policy is. I suspect that people working at the British National Oil Corporation have even less idea what the Government's policy is and are being left in confusion about what is being expected of them.

The point at issue is the consequence of what no hon. Member believes is anything less than Government intervention in an affair, in which the Government publicly stated they were not intervening. The Government's view was that BNOC acted at arm's length. However, it is obvious that the Government made it clear to BNOC that they wanted it to hold the price, presumably because maintaining a high price would produce a high revenue, which was crucial to their overall financial strategy.

If that is the Government's policy, they should have the honesty to admit it. They should make it clear that that is their objective. Even if it is their policy, it is not clear whether it is workable. This Government of all Governments claim to believe in the forces of the market, yet they have chosen to intervene. The consequence of that is our presence here to debate the £45 million subvention.

I wonder what Britain's real interests are. As the hon. Member for Havant said, before we discovered North sea oil we were sure that neither OPEC nor hi¸h oil prices were a good thing. Since we have become a significant oil producer, we have slipped into thinking—it is perhaps understandable — that high oil prices are to our advantage. However, we have not debated that openly and cleanly, or considered all the options, or whether there are intermediate options. We have effectively moved to the position in which the Government seek to maintain as high an oil price as possible to maximise their revenue.

The Government are not, for example, giving people in Britain who use oil any comparable advantage. On the contrary, people in the market for oil can often buy it more cheaply outside the United Kingdom than inside. Do the Government believe it fair and proper not only to fix the price of oil at the highest level to maximise revenues but, as a consequence of that, to secure a relatively high exchange rate? Industries that are affected by that get no corresponding benefits from the fact that we produce our own oil. We are no better off than if we bought North sea oil directly from OPEC. If the Government believe in the economics of the market, and as it is obvious that North sea oil does not cost anything like $30 a barrel to produce, why are we plugging ourselves into a cartel which we first opposed and them claimed not to have membership of or even direct interest in? In reality it is obvious that we are hanging in there closely.

Given the importance of the issue, the size of the sums involved and the vast quantities of oil that we produce, the matter should not simply be debated for three hours late on an afternoon before Christmas. The issue relates to the core of the managment of our biggest single national asset. The debate should not end today, but should start today and be extended hereafter.

Some members of BNOC staff may wish me to stress that two thirds of the oil that they trade is traded under participation agreements, for which there are long-term contractual arrangements that causes problems when the spot market expands and the spot market price falls. BNOC staff members have been able to deal independently as dealers on the spot market and although it would be an exaggeration to suggest that £500,000 from a £7 billion deal was an extreme profit, it is better than the £45 million loss on the remaining two thirds. That suggests that there is commercial ability in BNOC. I was going to say that BNOC lacks direction, but perhaps it does not know in which direction to move or from which direction the next instruction is likely to come. That leads to confusion.

The other factor that has arisen from the report, and which was touched on, is the anomaly that apparently exists within the British method of taxation—the so-called spinner. It enables oil companies to sell British oil and to obtain a tax benefit from so doing. It has reached such a stage that the tax rules relating to oil companies trading in North sea oil—what I might call British oil—are known as the plug hole or the sink. If an oil company is left with excessive quantities of several sorts of crude oil, it gets rid of North sea oil first because of the tax advantage. That puts further pressure on the price and causes more confusion in the market—confusion that must be to the disadvantage of Britain in general and especially to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, if he changed the rules, would not be accused so much of interfering in the market place and might get some revenue that he is currently foregoing.

I hope that the Minister of State will say whether the Government will consider doing something about the tax rules. They confuse everyone at present. They are confusing to those who take some interest in such matters, but to anyone who has no connection with the oil business, it looks like an unmitigated shambles that lacks proper direction. The Select Committee showed that there appears to be a Government policy, although it may be ill-advised and has not yet been declared. To the extent that a policy has been declared, it would appear to be opposite to what has happened.

The Government should come clean and explain to a much wider public than the few who might have a specialised interest in North sea oil what their objective is. What are we trying to do with our North sea oil assets? Is it simply a matter of getting them out as fast as possible, and trying to hold the price as high as possible to maximise short-term revenue so as to sustain the public sector borrowing requirement and our financial strategy, or do we have an industrial objective to ensure that we get some benefit from being a major oil producer and give ourselves some competitive advantage to ensure that we build an energy industry on the strength of our oil industry? Will there be some recognition that having a petro-currency has many unforeseen effects on our exchange rates?

Recently some paper industry manufacturers told me that the Bowater project that was scrapped about three years ago when the pound was worth $2·20 would have been viable had the pound been worth $1·75. Hon. Members will appreciate that the project would have made money hand over fist with the current rate of exchange at

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$1·17 or $1·18. The Government appear to be interested in achieving stability in the oil price, but they have abdicated all responsibility for stability in the exchange rates, which affect many industries that have no conception of the link between the pound as a petro-currency, Britain's overall trading position and the general mysteries of free exchange rates.

The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) estimated what would happen to exchange rates. He might be right; I might be right; anyone might be right. The experience of the past two or three years suggests that it will be difficult to predict or plan in those circumstances. If the Government's policy is to achieve stability in oil prices to the extent that the market will allow, the Minister must make it clear how will they relate that to their professed belief in allowing the market to operate freely and in accepting no responsibility for securing stability of the exchange rate. As yet, for reasons which I understand, although I am not sure that we have obtained the right benefits, Britain has not joined the European monetary system.

The Select Committee has provided a useful service in drawing this matter to our attention. I question whether we should approve the subvention, which has been introduced only because the Government appear to be pursuing a policy that is in direct contravention of their stated objective. The Government must not believe that they can continue in that vein, return to the House, after another period of falling prices, and expect the House cheerfully to cough up so much money. They will get a more hostile reception than they have today.

6.55 pm

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) because, although he is not a member of the Select Committee, which is a loss to us, I enjoyed his perceptive analysis of what has worried the Committee. May I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) for his inspired work as Chairman of the Committee and for his dedication to the job.

The Select Committee concluded that the British National Oil Corporation has become engaged in a creeping transformation, undeclared by the Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) so brilliantly said a few moments ago, BNOC was created with the primary objective of maintaining security of oil supplies for Britain at a time when there were shortages, political disruption and steeply rising prices. But without any redirection of policy by the Government, BNOC has been quietly instructed not to secure supply —that is unnecessary at a time of glut and falling prices —but to secure prices. Yet there has been a reluctance to admit that fundamental change in Government policy.

I am reminded of the long Committee debates in which some of us participated during the passing of the Oil and Gas Enterprise Bill in February and subsequent months in 1982. My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Energy, who is now our distinguished Chancellor of the Exchequer, said:

"The trading corporation will exist for the specific purpose of security of national oil supplies."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 25 February 1982; c. 631.]

We had lengthy discussions in Committee and we were considerably enlightened by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet), who expressed grave anxiety that the British National Oil Corporation was not being hived off or privatised. He believed that there was some doubt as to whether the corporation performed a useful function. He was not given the credit at the time for the amendments that he moved to try to enact the privatisation of the corporation, which were of course resisted by the Government. Nor was he given credit for his profound prognostications at the time.

I did not know that my hon. Friend would be in the Chamber today, and I hope that he is not embarrassed by this, but I shall quote what he said in Committee:

"I should not be surprised if the oil price fell further, to below $30 a barrel."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 11 February 1982; c. 167.]

At the time it was $34 a barrel, and on that basis my hon. Friend argued that there would be a serious impact on the role of BNOC if that trading company were faced with a declining market, difficult trading conditions and the losses that would result.

The Committee's inquiry clearly shows that that is exactly what has happened. There has been a clear change of policy by Government, but a refusal to admit it. Security in a time of glut is an irrelevance, and in any case we have the powers under the Energy Act 1976 to deal with crises. We have the right to buy 51 per cent. without BNOC if we ever needed to exercise that right. We should be curiously questioning why we have to exercise that right to purchase 51 per cent. through Government agencies when we do not need security of supply.

If the policy is to maintain the price of oil, the Government should say so. Why should it not be their policy? It is not a policy of which we need to be ashamed. After all, the Government have declared their policy in many other sectors of the economy where they believe that it is desirable to maintain prices well above market levels, and we accept that. For example, the Government support the airline cartel to maintain airline prices well above the market level, to protect international and national carriers. We may or may not agree that that is a good thing, but that is what happens and the Government admit it.

The Government maintain a coal cartel by subsidising by over £1 billion a year, an industry that produces coal that costs over 50 per cent. above world prices, and the aim is to protect the British coal industry. Some may dispute that policy, but it is accepted and admitted by the Government as official policy.

If my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy, who will be replying to the debate, wants a third example of where the Government are honest enough to admit maintaining prices above market levels, there is agriculture. The Government support a food cartel so that our food prices are well above world prices, and this is done to support our agriculture through the CAP. If we can accept Government policy that is believed to be in the national interests in other spheres of our economy, why do we not also accept that, if it is in the national interest to support the price of oil, we should do so? It would be a respectable argument, but the trouble is that we have not yet heard it, and that is what concerned the Committee.

I shall not be presumptuous enough to suggest whether it is in the national interest that we maintain the world price of oil or whether we would be better off if we allowed it to fall. We know that a decline in oil prices would help British industry and consumers, but it would not help the

pound, the public sector borrowing requirement or the Treasury. It might even endanger the viability of North sea investment. On the other hand, world trade would grow and we would benefit from that.

However, the Government's argument is that they would not be too happy about a price fall because our competitors, who do not produce oil, would benefit more from the price fall than we would. In particular, Japan, Germany, France and the United States would all stand to gain a great deal more than we would from a substantial reduction in world oil prices. Whatever the arguments, and they have been ably put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, let us at least hear them from the Government. Let it be spelt out — tonight I hope — whether it is in the national interest that we try to sustain the world price of oil and play what role we can in doing so. We should not hide behind BNOC, pretending that we believe in a free market, while authorising that company to try to support the market.

This leads to my principal doubt about the wisdom of the Government's policy towards BNOC, because if it is the Government's declared policy to try to stabilise the price of oil in the national interest, is not the present method of doing it through BNOC the worst possible way to try to achieve that? I should like an answer on this tonight. BNOC has maintained the stability of the oil price by buying oil at fixed prices off the oil companies and immediately selling it on the Spot Market in Rotterdam. Far from having stabilised the price, this may have contributed to a more rapid decline. As the chief executive of BNOC, Mr. Ian Goskirk, succinctly told the Select Committee when it questioned him:

"We cannot stand in the way of market forces."

However, it is clear that that is what the Government have asked BNOC to do.

Has BNOC helped by trying to stand in the way of market forces? Have not its market operations contributed to the fall in prices? Have not BNOC's forced sales on the spot market—it has no reserves in which to hold stocks and has to sell oil stocks as it gets them—become a major factor in the Rotterdam market becoming the price setter rather then the marginal market that it used to be? If the Government want to try to stabilise the price of oil, would they not be more honest to say so and to co-operate openly with OPEC, or even join it? At least we would then know where we are. Afer all, our interests are very much in line with those of OPEC. Government policy would be much more likely to succeed if we actually joined or co-operated more actively.

If the Government are not going to do that, but they wish to make an impact on stabilising the oil prices, they should at least agree to production quotas. That might at least make a useful contribution, as the way that BNOC is trying to influence the market has probably had the reverse effect. Instead of stuffing the Rotterdam spot market with oil as a distress seller, BNOC might have influenced the market more if it had operated in reverse and had bought from the Rotterdam stock market and then sold the oil to the oil companies that were short of crude. I doubt whether BNOC losses would have been greater if it had tried to do that, and it might have had a more beneficial effect on the market.

If the Government wish BNOC to play a role in influencing the market, they have to give BNOC enough muscle to be able to do so. In other words, they must allow it to have the resources with which to hold oil prices, as multinational oil companies do, so that it can operate with a little more flexibility and manoeuvrability than it does now. However, the present obscurity of the Government's stance is unsatisfactory, and I hope that it will not last beyond this evening.

BNOC could be scrapped because it no longer has a useful function, is not required to maintain security of supply and cannot control the market. That would allow the free market to find its own level and allow the oil companies to market their own oil, which they might be able to do without disturbing the market any more than BNOC does. If the Government do not want to take that line, they must outline an effective policy for practical intervention, which perhaps means curtailing production, using BNOC as a market buffer or collaborating more openly with OPEC. They have to take one course or the other, and at the moment we are stuck in the middle.

I hope that, by the end of this debate, the Government will be able to clarify what they believe is in the best national interest. Is it to try to maintain the price of oil, or to allow it to fall? Or do they believe that either course is in the best national interest? Whatever the reason, let the Government outline how they propose to pursue that policy more sensibly than they have so far by using BNOC as a front for policies which they have been incapable of implementing effectively.

7.10 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I thank the chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) for putting so well the Committee's findings on the winter Estimates. The House should consider the Committee's first recommendation. The winter Estimates do not have to be approved until February and yet the Committee had only three weeks to complete its inquiry before it had to come to the House. It is nonsense to have this debate at this time when the Committee could have considered the Estimates in more detail, and have taken more evidence.

I am a member of the Committee and I should have liked to have had the time to ask the Treasury about the implications of the Estimates. I should have liked to ask Treasury Ministers about the British National Oil Corporation.

As the Chairman of the Committee said, we found it easier to summon people than papers. We made several attempts to see a letter sent by the Minister to oil companies in August. Eventually, we got hold of 80 per cent. of the letter. Some remarks in it were missing. I told the Committee that I had already read 90 per cent. of the letter in the newspapers way back in August. It would have been helpful if the entire letter had been shown to us. It is nonsense that we should have had to struggle to obtain information about Estimates of this size.

In the brief time at our disposal we investigated the BNOC's role. Its first role seems to be to maintain supply. At a time of surplus and with a glut in the world energy market, it might seem to some hon. Members that that is not necessarily right. But I believe that it is essential that such an organisation is able to supply us with oil. In the 1960s and 1970s the position was different. Oil was tight on the world market and we could not maintain supply.

The middle east is unstable and OPEC countries are not able to guarantee supplying the world energy market for

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as long as six months, even at a time of surplus. War and other events could mean that we definitely need BNOC's right to 51 per cent. of production in British waters.

The Select Committee asked the Minister about prices and he replied in a forthright manner:

"Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Thank you. The first point I would make is that neither my Department nor myself set North Sea oil prices."

That is a definite statement which no one can misinterpret. The Minister went on:

"The BNOC has certain functions in relation to the participation agreements and setting its contract prices, and in doing so it forms its own judgment of the market situation, and also consults with my Department, and on occasion with myself, as to what the different factors are that should be taken into account before it sets any particular price."

In all innocence, no one could say that the Department does not have some influence on the setting of North sea oil prices. In the short time that the Committee had, it tried to get to the back of that influence and to find out what had been going on in the last six months.

The Minister has had a few days to reflect and he should tell us his Department's exact involvement. He has admitted that the Department is involved in the setting of prices. That should be debated in the House more fully. All hon. Members should know what is going on.

The Select Committee recommended that no more Supplementary Estimates should go to the BNOC until we are satisfied with the Department's involvement. That is not unreasonable. I do not favour voting against the Estimates if it is in the nation's interest to give public money for the North sea. However, we must know why we give the money and what has happened in the last six months. Against the wishes of many Government Members, because of their ideological stance on the free market economy, we are giving £45 million to private companies. Once that money leaves the BNOC it goes to private interests in the North sea. We should know exactly why £45 million of taxpayers's money should go to private offshore companies operating in British waters.

We must have some answers. How will the Minister ensure that we are informed? How do the Government view contract prices and BNOC's role in them? The Select Committee asked whether contract prices should be changed from three months to one month. I understand that that happens in Norway. Such a change could move contract prices closer to spot prices. The evidence to the Select Committee shows that the spot prices are as near as dammit to the average market price for oil. The three month contract price through BNOC has been higher for some time. Perhaps we should come nearer to the spot price because that seems sensible in terms of the cost of oil to Britain. The spot price share of the total oil market has risen in the past 10 years from 1 per cent. to 40 per cent. and it may not be long before the majority of oil sold on the open market is sold at the spot price.

What are the implications of paying £45 million into the BNOC? I assume that this is being done to maintain spot prices. I understand that tax revenues from North sea oil accrue from the spot price in any event. If £45 million is used to maintain spot price, the Treasury will benefit from the tax revenue. Is there a direct relationship between every £1 million that is used to keep up the spot price and the revenue so derived that is received by the Treasury? We were told in evidence that it would be in the national interest to grant the Supplementary Estimate to BNOC this winter and we should, therefore, know the exact nature of the national interest and whether the Treasury has been receiving revenue. If the Treasury has not accrued the revenue that was expected, there has been a net loss to the national interest. It is important that we ascertain whether that has happened.

It is predicted that there will be a fall in the price of oil. That will have a dramatic effect on Britain if the fall is significant. We have heard about the billions of pounds that the Treasury is receiving in the form of oil revenue. These moneys are used in various areas of the economy. If the moneys were lost, the effect on the United Kingdom economy would be catastrophic.

What would happen if we lowered the price of North sea oil to the spot price? What effect would that have on the revenue that is received by the Treasury and used thereafter to finance the welfare state, for example? Massive sums are received annually from North sea oil revenue and I want to know what will happen if there is a further fall in the price of that oil.

7.23 pm

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) for his kind of observations. I think that I should be fair to the British National Oil Corporation and acknowledge that it was profitable for at least part of 1984. If blame is to be levelled, it should be levelled at my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, and I say that with much regret.

The price of oil collapsed in July 1984. I tabled a question for written answer on 16 July 1984. I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy

"whether he proposes to give the British National Oil Corporation a specific direction on price for North sea crudes in view of the decline in spot prices."

His answer was:

"No. The prices of United Kingdom North sea crudes are governed by market forces and established by negotiation between BNOC and its customers and suppliers."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1984; Vol. 64, c. 67.]

My right hon. Friend stated in evidence to the Select Committee—this is to be found at page 44—

"The spot market is normally the more acccurate reflection of the market price at that moment of time."

That must be set against the colossal loss of £45 million by BNOC which eventually will have to be paid.

It can be argued that one of the first objectives of BNOC was to trade profitably. In 1983, the company made a profit of about half a million pounds on a turnover of about £7 billion, which is a profit of only 0·007 per cent. on turnover. Unfortunately, that was followed by a loss of £45 million in 1984. The corporation is not permitted by statute to act commercially.

At page 35 of the evidence, Lord Croham said:

"The framework which was agreed by Parliament makes it almost impossible for us to earn a profit on the great bulk of our transactions."

What is the use of blaming a corporation for bad results when it is working in an economic straitjacket? By mid-September 1984 the corporation was contractually committed to losses in excess of the value of its assets. If it had been a private concern, it would have been bankrupt. But for the state subsidy that was paid into it, nothing more could occur. We are resigned to the fact that £45 billion must be paid under section 6 of the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Act 1982. As grants under that section may

be made subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State for Energy, with the approval of the Treasury, may determine, what conditions are to be laid down?

The next objective of the state corporation is that it should receive the maximum benefit from the oil that is available, and that is normally expressed in terms of price. The Government are naturally interested in high prices. As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) said, North sea oil is a high-cost commodity. Prices range from anything between $6 a barrel to $20. I echo his anxiety about the threats of OPEC. Saudi Arabia's range of production costs is between 35 cents and 50 cents a barrel. That is almost basic and Saudi Arabia can reduce its prices significantly without injuring its own production. Oil is overpriced in the market and the revenue from North sea oil is such that the Treasury dominates the issue. The price of North sea oil is kept high to provide revenue. This is understood fully when it is recognised that the tax take on North sea oil for the five years between May 1979 and October 1984 was no less than £35 billion.

I direct myself to what is probably the most interesting part of the issue, and this is where I affix liability on the Government. They talk about consultations with BNOC, but the corporation is simply a negotiating front. The Government control the corporation while standing in the shallows. At page 15 of the evidence, Lord Croham said:

"we do not get details of the information available to the Government. We do get a Government's judgment as far as the national interest is concerned. We agree with Government judgments. It is their judgment, not ours."

There are an enormous number of factors which have nothing to do with BNOC. Let us consider them. There is United Kingdom standing in Saudi Arabia, which is a matter of great importance. There is the effect of pricing on world financial institutions. The indebtedness of Group 77 is of prime importance. The momentum of development in the North sea, the amount of investment and the fear of plunging prices are similarly critical issues. There are many other factors but I shall not refer to them now. These are matters for the Government and not for BNOC.

It is rather extraordinary that there are other factors that may induce the Secretary of State to reach his own decision and simply instruct BNOC what to do. Her Majesty's Government have the right to give a specific directive to BNOC, whenever they like, on a particular matter, including pricing, under section 4(1) of the Petroleum and Submarine Pipe-lines Act 1975. When Dr. Otaiba and Sheikh Yamani come to the United Kingdom, they are not concerned to see the chairman of BNOC; they go straight to the Secretary of State or the Minister of State if necessary, if the Secretary of State is not around. The man who can influence decisions is the man to whom they want to talk. It is not the distinguished chairman of BNOC; he might not be available. Anyhow, he is not the major front.

It was rather significant that if the Government were lacking in influence, the Minister of State should send that letter to the oil companies on 31 July 1984, which he refused to give to the Select Committee because it held confidential information. It urged the companies to support the figure that had been set by BNOC.

Furthermore, we know that OPEC is considering the matter tomorrow. Today's edition of the *Financial Times* contains an article with the heading:

"Government blocks BNOC move to stem losses".

That is just a heading; I shall not go into detail on that point, because the article is there for everyone to read. The newspaper is naturally assuming that the Government have the right to lay down what they consider to be the reality of the matter.

The third major objective of BNOC is security of supply. My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash dealt with that matter adequately. However, there is no problem in the present era of substantial surpluses. There are complete statutory controls covering 20 Acts of Parliament and a myriad of regulations over the North sea, and those operations go into considerable depth. The legislation includes the Energy Act 1976, which could be modified to provide for economic conditions short of crisis.

There is also a substantial indigenous oil industry and reserves in the United Kingdom. The Government hold a 31·731 per cent. investment in British Petroleum. That is not without significance. A strategic national reserve of proved areas could be established in the North sea, analogous to the naval reserves of the United States of America. They have not been so established. A strategic national storage facility could be evolved. That approach is well understood in the United States and Japan.

I should like to refer to the power to influence the market. It will be argued by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that there is a distinction between fundamental change and short-term fluctuations. That point was also made by one of the directors of the BNOC on page 16 of the notes of evidence. However, that is of little value if one cannot identify the difference between the two. It is well known that BNOC's power to influence crises such as those in 1973-74 and 1979-80 was absolutely nil. The power to use the marginal barrel to influence a saturated market when OPEC's production allocations are under threat is also extremely limited. It is notorious that no attempt was made to smooth the market in the way recommended when the price was going up. When the price went up from $1·5 a barrel to $12 a barrel, not a squeak. When it was going up from $12 to $25, not a squeak. When it went up to $40 in Libya, not a squeak. The power has been used only when the price has been in decline. There is a vested interest on the part of Government to keep it up for revenue purposes.

I should like to make some recommendations. There is no harm in hon. Members making recommendations, even though the Government may disregard them. The basic approach is simple. To reduce the quarterly period to one month for fixing price to prevent term and spot prices moving too far apart is one recommendation. It is open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make it if he wants, but it is only cosmetic. One could fix the price by the spot market, analogous to what is going on in Norway. That approach is understood and could be commended. If we must keep BNOC, we should abstract the United Kingdom from the centre of the debate about managed oil prices and intergovernmental relations with OPEC, by shifting to the United States system of allowing individual buyers to post prices according to the market. I give the analogy of refiners in the United States of America. Ministers should give full encouragement to the forward market that emerged in the United Kingdom in 1982 in response to the need for a hedging mechanism in the United Kingdom.

[Mr. T. H. H. Skeet]

There could be other recommendations as well. We could for the time being cease taking royalties in kind. We could reduce the amount of participation crude and, if the concept must be retained, we could reduce it to 20 per cent. of the total. Also, as BNOC has no long-term strategic storage facilities, if the corporation is to be retained, that prospect should be considered. The strategy involves the manipulation of stocks in relation to the market.

An alternative that I fully recommend, which I do not suppose the Minister will accept, is to abolish BNOC and let the industry operate subject to modifications of the Energy Act 1976. If BNOC is not abolished, a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for a comprehensive review might be useful.

I hope that my recommendations will be useful to the Minister if only because the structure of the market has been altered. In coming to his conclusions, he will note the ascendancy of the spot market in this era. It may change, but it is here for the moment and there has been a substantial decline in the term market. Spot prices for Arabian light are $27·45 while the term prices are $29. Spot prices for Brent blend are anything between $26·80 and $26·90, as opposed to the term price of $28·65. Therefore, spot is vital and one has to get a price near to it to avoid loss.

OPEC members ignore official prices. OPEC does not sell at term prices, and many members over-produce—the Nigerians, the Iranians and the Emirates——

Mr. Rowlands: And the United Kingdom.

Mr. Skeet: Those countries exceed agreed production quotas. The United Kingdom does not have agreed production figures.

Those countries exceed production quotas, formerly 17·5 million barrels a day and now 16 million barrels a day. Half of them sell at discounts and under barter arrangements and by other means. It is hypocritical on their part to say that the United Kingdom's action is wrong. The United Kingdom could afford to be much more courageous. The size of stocks is often the invisible factor. The stock position is becoming a key factor. It could have played a distinctive and much more effective role in the 1979-80 crisis.

All that I shall say about taxation is that current taxation distorts the market. The current differentials do not make sense. The problem has arisen because differentials between light and heavy crude oils have not been changed, and it does not look as if there is any possibility of OPEC getting together to change them.

There have been one or two other changes—a change in the use of oil and the yield of products, and a decline in the energy-intensive industries. The impact of conservation has been greatly underestimated.

BNOC and the Government have failed to assess correctly the measure of demand in a saturated market and to recognise the inability of OPEC members to maintain their production quotas and change differentials. For the time being, the market is on the way down. I suggest that the grant should be made only subject to the strict conditions under section 6(2) of the 1982 Act; otherwise it would be unreasonable for the House to pass it.

7.40 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): I am grateful for this opportunity of saying a few words in this debate which, as has already been said, comes on the eve of an important OPEC meeting tomorrow. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd), the Chairman of the Select Committee, on the excellent way in which he introduced the debate. We have heard a fascinating series of speeches, and the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) was superb in its analysis of the situation facing us.

It is equally important that we should be debating oil at a time when our minds have been totally concentrated on the crisis in the coal industry. In a way, like many energy matters, the two subjects are related, although not in the context of this debate. The heavy use of oil in our power stations has replaced coal burning, and has thereby eased the surplus of heavy oil stocks which now exists.

The extra amount of oil now consumed by our electricity generating stations must, however, have a limited effect on the overall world situation. But if instead of recent reports of attacks by Iraqi jets on oil tankers in the Gulf there were reports of the closure of the Straits of Hormuz by action there, the present situation would be totally reversed, and we would be discussing the crisis of oil shortages developing, not in weeks or months, but literally in hours.

We have experienced that in the past, and it will be remembered that within hours queues were forming at garages, rationing was considered and all sorts of emergency measures were taken. A recurrence is not a remote possibility. It is a very real one. The Iran-Iraq war has not ended and more and more is becoming a war of attrition aimed at oil production and the movement of oil rather than a swift land-based assault.

We are now in the middle of a coal industry dispute, and are dependent on a large oil burn in our power stations, yet in the middle east there is potential for disaster in relation to oil supplies. BNOC as it exists today—a trading company in North sea oil—is a security weapon for the Government. In my view it should be retained and clearly explained as such.

Although private oil companies have given assurances of supply to the United Kingdom market in the event of a crisis, access to 51 per cent. of participation oil, which BNOC has by law, would be a valuable underpinning of our crude oil supplies in the event of such an emergency. I therefore believe that we are right to continue the present BNOC role in relation to security of supply.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this report is the role of Government in the pricing of our oil. I actually believe that there is a limited role to play and that it should be clearly stated. I accept the Select Committee's criticism that perhaps this has not been clearly stated, and the debate gives my right hon. Friend the Minister of State an opportunity more clearly to define that role.

If one accepts my description of the crisis that could develop quickly, no one can doubt that at very short notice oil prices could begin to escalate sharply, thereby affecting world currencies and creating economic instability. The same situation could develop in reverse and there could be a downward spiral of oil prices. The oil market is unstable at present, with excess world production capacity, and the

marginal cost of production is much lower than the current world price, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant clearly explained.

In the short term, oil demand and production are insensitive to price, but with Nigeria threatening to match any price reduction by BNOC, and with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states speaking in terms of a price war would force other oil producers out of the market, there might be no clear bottom to such a free fall in oil prices.

I do not believe that we would benefit from a collapse in oil prices. I doubt whether any hon. Member believes that. But great damage could be caused to the world banking system and to the basis for industrial investment in energy industries, not just in production but in energy-using and conservation industries.

The likelihood is, as in the 1970s, that we would experience a sharp increase as equilibrium was restored. We would again be in the seesaw position that we were in throughout the late part of the 1970s and the early 1980s, and our own expensive North sea oil-producing sector would be hard hit.

Only this morning I asked a number of oil company executives whether they felt that BNOC should continue to play a role, however limited, in pricing at the margin. They all felt that such a role had to be played. If we accept that BNOC can exert any stabilising influence, even in the shortest of terms, it should continue to do so. The spot market is declining, companies are releasing stocks on to the market, and traders are selling short in the expectation of a price fall. OPEC meets tomorrow and it must decide its response.

In these circumstances, a price cut by BNOC before this meeting would further undermine market confidence and prompt a further "stock draw" and short selling. That would set off price cuts by other producers, and again we would get caught in the downward spiral of the collapse of oil prices. Nor would such an action enable BNOC to reduce its losses, as in that kind of uncertain market spot prices are likely to fall by as much as, or more than, term contract prices would be cut. It would therefore be wise to wait until underlying market trends have been clarified by the OPEC meeting and we have a truer indication of the winter demand for oil. Experience has shown how a change in climatic conditions in the winter can materially affect oil demand within a short period.

The Select Committee was right to draw attention to the role of BNOC and, therefore, the Government's role in oil pricing. I accept that there is an inter-relationship between the two. The £45 million losses during the recent period of falling spot oil prices requires detailed explanation, although in oil trading terms that is not a large amount and might easily be recouped in a stable or rising market. When one looks at the figures of the major oil companies, one can see that a comparatively small amount of money is lost or gained. In any case, I imagine that the Exchequer recoups most of this loss in increased tax revenue. I hope that my right hon. Friend will confirm that.

I do not believe that BNOC or the Government have any illusions about their power to determine or influence oil prices in other than the most limited or marginal way. It would be wrong for BNOC to try to lead in fixing oil prices, but any attempt to retain stability is to be welcomed. The BNOC price card can be played only occasionally. It cannot be used every few months. There must be quite a long interval between occasion of its use. I hope that my right hon. Friend will assure the House that he accepts this description of BNOC's role and that the present losses on trading will be eliminated once the threatened free for all drop in prices has been averted. Our thanks are due to my hon. Friend and his Committee for the excellent work they carried out in a very short period of time. I hope that we shall receive a number of detailed answers to the questions that the committee raised.

In conclusion, may I say to the House that I have another parliamentary engagement to fulfil, which was fixed a long time ago. Therefore, I hope that my right hon. Friend and hon. Members will excuse me if I am not here for the winding-up speeches.

7.50 pm

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): At the risk of placing yet another laurel on the stoical head of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) I shall nevertheless do so; it is a risk worth taking. My hon. Friend performed an excellent job in chairing the Select Committee throughout this important inquiry. I run a risk in experiencing chairmanship of that kind. As a relatively new Member of the House I am beginning to think that these inquiries can take place within 15 days, with an immediate debate on the report being held on the Floor of the House. Perhaps that illusion will be shattered in due course. In congratulating my hon. Friend, may I extend my remarks not only to my hon. Friend and to my colleagues on the Committee but to the officers who serviced the Committee and produced a draft report and then a final report within very strict guidelines.

A number of interesting points have been highlighted relating to BNOC. Much has been said about its important statutory responsibility to secure supply. During the inquiry I felt that the responsibility for ensuring security of supply was outweighed by what my right hon. Friend the Minister believed to be another responsibility of equal, if not overriding importance, namely the national interest. Throughout our short inquiry, it seemed to me that the definition of "national interest" was at the centre of the investigation. My view is that, when the legislation was framed, drafted and passed by the House, "national interest" had a different meaning from its present definition. My view is that "national interest" had some connection with security of supply. It had to be placed in the context of the failure of the oil companies that were participating in North sea development to give satisfactory undertakings to the Government of the day that in a crisis they would continue to supply resources to the Government. What has taken place since then is an indication of a change in the definition of "national interest". This definition was returned to again and again during the evidence given by both BNOC and my right hon. Friend. I ask my right hon. Friend to elaborate in his winding-up speech upon what he now believes to be the national interest.

It is possible that a case could be made for maintaining BNOC involvement in the national interest, whatever that may be. The problem is that it has not yet been properly defined. There has been a departure from the original concept. Is it in the national interest to maintain a continuous process of investment in the North sea? I understand that oil companies and others who are involved in North sea developments and its potential believe this to be a great priority. That may be a national interest which is worth developing.

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

Is it in the national interest to maintain the price of oil at a certain level so that the Exchequer benefits from it? The evidence we heard leads me to say that that is not the case — for two reasons. There is the view that the Exchequer benefits from a high price and a high tax take. Alternatively, if we support the price of oil, as we are doing in this supplementary Estimate, the view is that we have to vote sufficient funds to supplement the losses of BNOC. It goes further than that and points to another motive of the Government.

There is not a strict balance between the benefit to the Exchequer and the benefit to the country and BNOC as a whole in maintaining prices if they operate a tax break system. I do not suggest that there was a covert arrangement. However, an arrangement was certainly arrived at by the Treasury which gave those who participated in purchasing oil and selling it on the market at BNOC prices a marker price. This was fixed for revenue and tax purposes at a totally different level than that which was fixed by BNOC. That indicates that another extremely relevant factor was involved in what the Government were doing. This goes to the crux of the matter.

We were constantly told in the evidence by parties who were mutually engaged in discussions, conversations and various exchanges of influence that one had no effective influence over the other. I found this to be quite incredible. Perhaps I may suggest to the House a similar example. If a man and his mistress are found in flagrante delicto—not in a seedy hotel but in a comfortable hotel—and they suggest that they are engaged in no more than an exchange of views, one could take an objective view of it. However, my objective view of the suggestion made by my right hon. Friend and BNOC in their evidence was that I did not believe it. I believe that there was collusion and a certainty of purpose in their negotiations and discussions and that they went along with each other in very close agreement. The question before the House is whether that was in the national interest and whether it is right that we should vote the supplementary Estimate.

I credit my right hon. Friend with a little more horse sense than to suggest to the House that this came out of the blue. I believe that it was unique. There has been an attempt to influence oil prices. My right hon. Friend probably understands that in a wider context and in the more difficult market than has been faced during the last 10 or 12 months this might be impossible. However, there was an opportunity, and the Government took it. In this instance, the price is relatively low. However, I doubt very much whether this kind of opportunity can be taken again.

It is worth considering where we go from here. It is essential that we should move towards a more market-oriented pricing system for BNOC. The lead has been given by Norway. I believe that it will inevitably be followed, unless we are to come back to the House continually with supplementary Estimates of this kind. If this were to be a permanent feature of Government policy, the supplementary Estimate would not be for £45 million. It would be for a figure well in excess of £45 million. I accept that this is an extremely delicate time. Meetings of OPEC are taking place. Therefore, it is impossible for my right hon. Friend to form a firm view. However, it would be helpful if he could tell us that movement is taking place towards a more market-oriented pricing system. Unless such an indication is given, we must assume that the policy of this country is that oil prices should be kept high—for the good of what? I do not take the view that our manufacturing industries should be thrown away or put at a disadvantage compared with our industrial competitors. My view is that if within the broad context of Government policy it is possible to achieve a low energy pricing policy, we should be decisively striving towards it rather than trying to prevent it. I shall be most interested to hear my right hon. Friend's views on the direction in which he sees Government policy going.

It would be unfortunate if, in the future, we were always debating whether BNOC should be continually subvented. Can we tonight have a clear view of where Government policy is leading? If my right hon. Friend can convince the House that to subsidise oil prices with taxpayers' money, albeit in a somewhat circuitous way, is worthwhile for Britain, let us hear that and argue it out on the Floor of the House. My right hon. Friend may well convince us on that point.

Unless my right hon. Friend is prepared to admit that the purposes for which the BNOC was set up in the first place have been long outlived by the practical realities of the market—the fact of a continuously rising oil price until relatively recently and the fact that Britain is now a major producer and is well able in an oil glut to secure its supply—the debate would be sterile. That would be a loss, in view of all the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) did in Committee.

8 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Having been brought up against a Welsh nonconformist background, I shall not follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) in the habits he so vividly described in Latin terms. But I shall follow him in one other sense; that is to convey my congratulations and thanks to the Chairman and members of the Select Committee for producing this short and sharp report.

It is sharp in more ways than one. I am too gentle a soul to draw too much attention to some of the things that the Committee says about the Government's policy and their attitude and approach. The Minister will have read it and the strictures are there. However, it was invaluable in helping us to concentrate our minds.

I felt a nostalgia for our debates on the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Bill. There are few survivors of those Committees. The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) and I spent many an hour debating the problems that would arise in BNOC once it was shorn from the mainstream exploration and development side which was hived off in the form of Britoil.

Between us we made a number of forecasts about the potential vulnerability of a national oil corporation left to trade in the way that it was. No hon. Members, despite our perception, forecasting and crystal ball gazing, quite foresaw the way in which the financial crisis would hit BNOC. Why we did not has been brought out by several hon. Members who have spoken. We spent our time thinking that BNOC (Trading) had only one objective, and that was to secure supplies.

I cannot recall debating the other objectives at any length in Committee. The then Secretary of State for Energy, who is now Chancellor, and his Ministers, did not produce any argument in favour of a BNOC trading organisation other than to ensure the security of supply.

Clearly, in doing that, the corporation would become involved in pricing, but it would, in a sense, always be reacting to pricing and not in any way trying to shape up.

It is clear that in recent months, for reasons which await a more elaborate account from the Minister, BNOC and the Government have been trying to do something rather different from what was traditionally seen to be the role of BNOC (Trading). It would be easy to heap blame on a state organisation that has lost £45 million. But, as the report and the evidence clearly show, the decision was taken by the Government and BNOC after consultation. We should not try to blame BNOC. It was arrived at by a joint process.

Let me underline that point. In paragraph 93 of the evidence the Minister gave the striking testimony:

"I believe the BNOC has scope to act in the short term to influence what may happen in the oil market."

That was a straightforward admission that the Government supported and were involved in the process of trying to do something, albeit in the short term, about oil prices.

Mr. Goskirk, in his evidence at paragraph 9, underlined that point even more strongly. He said:

"we felt that it was worthwhile as far as both our commercial interest and—following discussion with the Secretary of State for Energy—the national interest were concerned to seek a pause. That pause took place and the pause was achieved".

Again, that is a clear statement of a deliberate endeavour. We do not say that the Government have acted surreptitiously. At least in the evidence there is a confession that there was a joint operation of a kind and character which, when we debated the notion and nature of the BNOC, I cannot recall ever envisaging.

Therefore, we have every right to say that there is not just a change in degree but a qualitative change in the way in which the BNOC and the Government tried to do something about oil prices in the summer of this year. We must ask why they did it, what has been the consequence and where we go from here. Those are the three questions posed in one way or another by the Select Committee's report.

I should like to have a shot at trying to answer some of those questions. Let me try to offer a slightly different interpretation of events from that produced by the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and one or two other hon. Members who have spoken critically of the attitude of Government and BNOC to oil prices.

I do not think for one moment that either BNOC or the Government chose to become involved. It was not some sort of great voluntary act. The missing ingredient in the otherwise excellent Select Committee's report is some sort of analysis of how events unfolded over the 18 months leading up to the events of this summer. If we look back at those 18 months and at the role oil plays in our economy, we can anticipate some of the answers that the Minister might wish to give as to why we became involved in the way that we did this summer.

I have discussed the matter with various people and I believe that part of the answer lies in the events of February and March 1983. Until then, BNOC (Trading) and the Government had managed to stay out of the price argument in international terms. BNOC did what we all thought it was doing—reacted to prices. When the market shifted its price moved.

There was a vigorous reaction by OPEC and, particularly, the Nigerians, in February and March 1983 when they trumped the BNOC alteration in price and therefore deliberately involved BNOC and the Government in the whole argument about pricing policy. Until then we had stayed out of the turmoil of OPEC arguments and the problems of the various conflicting interests within OPEC. From that time on BNOC, the Government and North sea oil prices were caught up in the commercial and political swirl of OPEC and the problems of some of its members. Therefore, we did not have much choice. We did not volunteer—I hope that the Minister did not volunteer—to get involved in those arguments. There was a reaction from OPEC to the situation.

If one agrees with that assessment and interpretation, it helps us to try to understand what followed. Once such a situation occurs, North sea oil prices become a politically sensitive issue. They become part and parcel of an argument with OPEC. I cannot recall Sheikh Yamani or the chairman of OPEC making statements of the kind that we have seen today on the tapes or in the last few days and weeks about North sea oil prices. It is not our position but OPEC's that is the reason for our sudden involvement. OPEC's whole ramshackle effort to sustain a price and to balance and juggle its position is in trouble.

The ultimate absurdity was when the Norwegians managed to create the last oil crisis. Who, in the name of heaven, would have thought that the Norwegians could create an oil crisis? The only reason why the Norwegians have managed to create an oil crisis and North sea oil prices have become politically sensitive is that OPEC cannot square the situation. OPEC cannot balance the books. It cannot balance the relationship between production price and demand. It is trying to do so, and I understand the reasons for that, but the problem is with OPEC. We have been caught up in the swirl. That is one of the reasons why British and Norwegian North sea oil prices, BNOC and Statoil are now causing not so much a ripple as a shudder throughout the system. It is because the system itself is now unstable.

In one sense, Sheikh Yamani has a point. Throughout his evidence to the Select Committee the Minister defended the short-term intervention on the ground that it was an attempt to stabilise the situation. He does not seem to mind which way prices go, so long as they go quietly. Whether they go up or down he seems not to have a view, although we shall try to tease one out of him today. Because he wanted them to go quietly, he was interested in stability. I suspect, however, that the only people who can provide some kind of stability are the members of OPEC.

Mr. Skeet: But they cannot.

Mr. Rowlands: Perhaps not, but only OPEC has the size and weight even to attempt it. Sheikh Yamani thus has some right to feel that there is still something of perfidious Albion about us. We talk about price stability and indulge in mini-interventions in the market, while draining our North sea oil at a fantastic pace. Despite the abortive attempt to cut the price in July so as to sell the oil, I suspect that most people are on their prayer mats praying that OPEC will succeed in holding something like the current price level. For a variety of reasons, a sudden downward lurch in oil prices may not be in the interests of the British economy. I leave that open to question as I intend to return to the points raised by Conservative Members about the national interest in this respect. At any rate, if we are talking about price stability only OPEC is capable of achieving that. Experience in July certainly showed that

[Mr. Rowlands]

the British Government and BNOC cannot do much about it. Moreover, the attempt cost £45 million. We must therefore be careful where we stand on this.

Mr. Skeet: The hon. Gentleman must face reality. If demand is slack and OPEC cannot control its member states, which constantly seek to increase production, there will be a greater surplus and prices will fall in the long term.

Mr. Rowlands: If the hon. Gentleman had listened more carefully, he would realise that I had described that situation as vividly as he has. As I have said, OPEC has and will continue to have great difficulty in maintaining that ramshackle operation.

Mr. Skeet: Why should we support it?

Mr. Rowlands: I did not say that we should. I am about to give my view on the matter. I was saying that Sheikh Yamani might have a point because we keep talking about price stability when he and OPEC are the only people capable of trying to achieve a measure of stability. It may not be in our interests for that to happen, but in the summer the Government and BNOC tried in a small way to stabilise prices and to create a pause through a minor form of intervention.

Mr. Skeet *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rowlands: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. I know that the attempt failed. It tried to buck the system, but the power of the market was far greater than the effort put into the attempt to influence it. Nevertheless, if Sheikh Yamani were in the House today I believe that he would try to make the case that I have described, although personally I do not agree with it and I do not believe that it is necessarily in our best interest for OPEC to succeed in its attempt.

This is what we want to know from the Minister. It was he, not the Select Committee or the Opposition, who talked about the greater national interest. We are entitled to ask him to define what he means by that. The Select Committee believes that the Government have an oil price policy. I do not know whether they have such a policy, but assuming that they do, it is a somewhat schizophrenic one to say the least. I hope that the Minister will define what he regards as the broader national interest in relation to the action that he has chosen to take.

Like other hon. Members, I wish to emphasise the dilemmas and conundrums that face us when we discuss the national interest in relation to oil prices. A fairly dramatic fall in oil prices, albeit organised to take place reasonably steadily, might help to recreate our non-oil economy. The area that I represent would certainly welcome support and assistance to recreate our manufacturing industry. On the other hand, a high and stable price is perhaps the only way to ensure development of our most marginal oilfields. What is the Minister's view on that? Would a fall in price of the kind described by the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), a former Secretary of State, have a detrimental effect on the marginal oil fields so important to future North sea oil supplies? Would a high, stable oil price prevent further decimation of our currency against the dollar? In one year we have already devalued our currency by 25 per cent. against the dollar.

The right hon. Member for Guildford seemed to take a rather sanguine attitude to the possible impact on our currency of a fall in oil price of $4 or so per barrel. I should have expected such a major issue to arouse considerable worry. Certainly the Treasury could not ignore it unless the Government's "sound money" policy has now been abandoned. As virtually every hon. Member has pointed out, the Chancellor is like an addict. He is hooked on the oil revenue and cannot afford to come off it. To add to our conundrums and dilemmas, the Chancellor's position is perhaps the most curious of all. Every time the pound goes down his oil revenues increase because they are calculated in dollars, giving him a rather perverse, topsy-turvy interest in further devaluation of the pound against the dollar.

Those are the dilemmas and conundrums that we face and to which the Select Committee rightly challenged the Government to respond. I feel that the poor Minister of State, Department of Energy should not really be facing these questions, as answering them should be the job of the Chancellor. Nevertheless, we can ask the Minister of State what he intends to do in response to the situation in which BNOC and the Government now find themselves.

However, we must be careful. Here I part company with some Conservative Members. In the longer term I believe that there remains an important role—a vital role—for BNOC in maintaining the security of our oil supplies. That was the original reason for maintaining a state trading oil company, and we should not be blown off course because in the short term we have a glut of oil and BNOC has to change the shrewd and skilful pricing operation which it maintained until last summer. There is a strong case for retaining BNOC (Trading), which has been and can still be a sensible and useful instrument.

It is a pity that the Chancellor of the Exchequer—the former Secretary of State for Energy — is not here, although he has apologised to us for his absence and explained his reasons. He, more than anyone else, knows the value of BNOC and how it can marginally alter the situation and bring oil back into the market. In the summer of 1979, he was harried at the Dispatch Box by Government and Opposition Members about the shortage of oil at filling stations throughout the country. He knows about the skilful role played by BNOC in bringing back into our market not a huge but a significant and useful amount of oil and in trying to stabilise oil supplies within the United Kingdom. He will also know — here I disagree with the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost), who said that if BNOC carries on, it could cut the volume of oil purchased—that volume is essential for flexibility and for the potential of affecting the market in a time of crisis or shortage. It was so in 1979 and would be so in a future crisis.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) tried to argue that we have other means of ensuring that we do not run short of oil. He had the audacity to quote British Petroleum as an example. In 1973-74, when the Government owned a much greater percentage of BP and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) called in the chairman of BP on the question whether BP should make some great national contribution to the management of the crisis, he was given short shrift — or so I understand from some of the books and articles that I have read. We cannot rely on a 30 per cent. share in BP to offer security of supply. I do not think that the cumbersome and draconian powers in the 1976 Energy

Act would suffice either. We argued that out in discussion on the Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Act 1982. There is no sensible solution in that direction. We have a sensible, helpful, professionally organised and professionally run trading corporation which has been given that function. In my view, despite the problems identified in the report, and the Committee's strictures and the valuable questions that it has posed, the corporation should be allowed to survive.

8.24 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith): I should like first to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd)—as other right hon. and hon. Members have done—on chairing the Select Committee and presenting the report today. I would certainly wish to echo the congratulations that have been showered on my hon. Friend and his Committee from every side. They are to be congratulated especially on the speed with which they carried through their investigation. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on the manner in which he presented his report to us. In many respects, his speech was a model of the way in which such reports should be presented. My hon. Friend will not, however, be surprised to hear that, although I admire his style, I do not wholly agree with the content of his speech.

This is an important subject, and I think that the Select Committee did a good job in a short time, although I may not agree with everything said in the report. The subject is important not only to the members of the Select Committee, to my Department and to BNOC, but on a much wider scale. It is therefore disappointing that the House is not crowded—to say the least—for this debate. I understand the reasons why some hon. Members who have participated in the debate have not been able to see the matter to its conclusion, but I am sorry that they are not here.

Firstly, I wish to deal with one or two points not referred to so far at any length, although my hon. Friend the Member for Havant referred to some of them. I refer to some of the procedural points to which the Committee drew attention in the third paragraph of its report. As the members of the Select Committee will understand, some of those matters are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I have drawn those matters to his attention.

However, one of the procedural points lies closer to my own responsibilities. I refer to the recommendation that, in future, minutes notifying Parliament of a contingent liability to the Consolidated Fund should be copied to the Public Accounts Committee and the relevant departmental Select Committee. I discussed that point with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, and the Goverment accept the Committee's view. My right hon. Friend is asking all Government Departments to observe that practice in future. I apologise to the Committee for not having done so in this case, and I am glad that this occasion has given us an opportunity to change in a minor but important way the procedures that we follow in relation to Select Committees and supplementary estimates.

On the main subject of the debate, I have the same views as I expressed when I appeared before the Select Committee a week ago. There are two central themes. First, is it necessary to retain BNOC? The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) dwelt on that point in the latter part of his speech. He spoke about participation and security of supply. The second theme is the exact nature of the Government's relationship to BNOC and the Government's policy in relation to actions that may be followed by BNOC in carrying out its responsibilities.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) were right to draw attention to one of the fundamental subjects of discussion in such a debate—the role of BNOC in relation to its participation agreements and to the security of supply. I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) that under the participation agreements, which have been fully discussed in earlier debates, BNOC has to give notice up to two years in advance. If one takes the view that BNOC should work in a more flexible way, one should be prepared to argue that there should be no participation agreements. However, if one has participation agreements, and contracts have to be entered into in advance and notice has to be given, it is inevitable that the situation cannot be as flexible as my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash and some other hon. Members would wish.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, we could face disruption in the Gulf at any time. Exocets are still used against tankers, and Iran is still threatening retaliation on the oil trade of other Arab states. Most of the present world surplus capacity is also in the Gulf. If production there were lost, so also would be the spare capacity. During the past 12 months one of the main anxieties in the European Community which is principally an oil-consuming interest, and in the International Energy Agency has been the threat of an interruption in the supply of oil from the Gulf. Although there is a surplus, the IEA reviewed its contingency plans which culminated in co-ordination, especially over the use of stocks. The agreement was reached as recently as 11 July. The adequate stocks of oil have been discussed three times this year at meetings of the Energy Council of the European Community which I have attended. Simply because we transparently have a surplus, we should not dismiss the argument about security of supply. We should also bear it in mind that security of supplying is of interest to other consuming countries.

However, participation is not a simply a matter of security. We must ensure that the United Kingdom continental shelf and the price that Britain secures for oil in international markets is not entirely under the control of international integrated companies. We must also ensure that there are some arms length sales at transparent prices. That is an important function which BNOC performs in setting the reference price. I know that there are other systems. Some have been mentioned in Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North, (Mr. Skeet) in his knowledgeable speech—I expect no less of him—referred to the American posted price system. Other systems are not necessarily comparable with those which we work. The American system is based on a strong independent refinery sector. That makes it much easier to establish the arm's-length price. If we think that we need another system, it is not enough simply to draw attention to systems in other countries.

In regard to security of supply and a reference price for taxation purposes, BNOC performs an important and useful function. The second main area of debate today and

[Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith]

in the Committee concerns policy on oil prices. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that we appear to have no policy. I only wish that he had read the Committee's evidence. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney obviously has. If the hon. Member for Gordon had read my evidence to the Committee and that of the BNOC, I do not believe that he would have said what he did. I accept what my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who has had experience of these responsibilities, and others have said. I told the Select Committee that the United Kingdom cannot control world oil prices. I accept that. We are only a minor player as compared to others. A country is given power in the world oil market by its production capacity and reserves. The United Kingdom is in a relatively minor league in that regard as compared to other countries such as Russia and the United States. Saudi Arabia is in a completely different league as it has four times our production capacity and 13 times our reserves. Moreover, it is able to vary production from less than 4 million barrels a day to 10 million barrels a day. That puts the matter into perspective. As I think I have made clear, the United Kingdom cannot influence any long-term trend in oil prices.

Mr. Skeet: On 16 July—at the time of the collapse of prices—my right hon. Friend told me that there were market forces which guide BNOC. I assume that he did not intervene to save this great liability because some other factors were involved. What were they? What were the factors that he was keen to operate on which would stay the hand of BNOC? My right hon. Friend did not intervene on oil prices when he could have done to save the situation.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Perhaps my hon. Friend will give me a little more time to develop my speech. I should like to deal with the relationship between the Government and BNOC. I should like also to answer the question which more than one hon. Member has asked—what price level the United Kingdom and the Government believe correct. As I endeavoured to make clear in the Select Committee last week, the Government do not believe that any given price is desirable in the national interest. I accept in general terms that a lower price would stimulate the world economy and lead to various advantages. However, it would also lead to certain disadvantages. That issue is, to some extent, academic. The Select Committee considered it. As I said in the Committee, the question is academic because we do not believe that anything we do will influence the long-term movement of world prices. However, we recognise that precipitate changes in price pose a danger in the world oil market. There is no short-term economic limit to the price to which oil could rise, nor is there any economic floor. There is always a risk that once the price has started to change there can be a huge and fast change.

Mr. Skeet: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My hon. Friend has made his speech. Perhaps he will allow me to develop mine.

In an effective speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said that there could be a role for BNOC or the Government in the short term taking an interest in what happens to oil prices. If BNOC allowed a fast, sharp and precipitate change in the short term, great damage could result. That is the type of national interest to which I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North to address himself.

Mr. Skeet: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I shall give way soon. My hon. Friend has asked me to say what the national interest is. He wants to interrupt me before I have completed my answer. Short-term precipitate changes would damage the economy. They would destroy some of the basis for industrial investment, especially in energy industries and, I believe, in energy-using industries and energy conservation. On a much wider scale, those changes could have a severe influence on the world banking system. That view is taken by not only the Government but the International Energy Agency, which is an arm of the OECD on which the consuming economies greatly outnumber the producing economies. My view is not one taken by the producing countries, as some hon. Members sought to make out, but is shared by consuming countries, not least in the OECD.

Mr. Skeet: My right hon. Friend said that the intervention would smooth over difficulties whether the price was going down or up. When the price went up, it increased by leaps and bounds. There were pauses and opportunities for his Government to intervene. The Government let the prices go increasingly higher because they knew they could have an interest. The only time there was intervention was when the prices were coming down.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I do not believe that my hon. Friend is wholly correct. This debate has occurred in the context of a decreasing world price, but in the 1978-80 period BNOC price rises lagged behind those of OPEC countries. To some extent, that had a smoothing effect and acted as a restraint on certain proposals, although the price did go to a higher level. I believe that BNOC could not have influenced the eventual level reached. No more, no less—I used that phrase last week—does BNOC seek to influence price during a downward movement of prices. I believe that BNOC can have relatively little influence on the eventual price, but it can smooth the movement from one market to another, and that is why its role is important.

Mr. Rowlands: As he did in his evidence to the Select Committee, the Minister has emphasised that the Government want stability of movement of price. What does the right hon. Gentleman believe is desirable to come from the OPEC talks tomorrow?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The hon. Gentleman would think me naive if I were prepared to speculate on the OPEC talks. I shall correct the hon. Gentleman on one point. He said that I was interested in stability of prices. The Government and BNOC are interested in the stability of prices—in the short term. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford that we do not have an influence on long-term movement of prices. We have an opportunity to assist stability in the short term in a movement from one market to another.

The Government's policy on oil prices has been stated more than once. It is to avoid destabilising moves in the short term. To the limited extent BNOC can influence events, its aim has been to promote stability. BNOC has

therefore resisted making precipitate responses to short-term, speculative, spot price movements. I emphasise yet again that BNOC cannot and should not stand in the way of underlying market trends. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) will accept that point. With respect, I do not believe that the Select Committee gave sufficient attention to that aspect.

Mr. Bruce: Given that the right hon. Gentleman says that the policy to intervene aims to provide short-term, but not long-term, influence on the trend, is it likely that the right hon. Gentleman will have to return to the House on other occasions with a request for a similar amount of money? That is the implication in the right hon. Gentleman's speech.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I cannot answer for what may happen in the future, but I remind hon. Members who have raised this point that this possibility was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he was Secretary of State for Energy. He made those points to the Committee in 1982 when the legislation provided specifically for moneys of this nature. My right hon. Friend admitted that it was conceivable that the corporation could, in some years, incur losses, and that is precisely what has happened. There is nothing unusual or unpredictable in what has happened.

We are not trying to control or interfere with the market in the longer term. We agreed with BNOC that a price cut in July or August could be damaging. It would have been incredible for the Government to sit back and do nothing. After discussing the matter with the oil companies, I asked them to think carefully before pressing BNOC to make any premature price cut. When the companies saw that a precipitate price cut could be avoided, they not only co-operated but contributed towards it. That action was taken sensibly and rationally. I emphasise that this cut was not a novelty. In 1980, we pressed companies to avoid abnormal market transactions that might push prices up. There was, therefore, nothing new in the relationship between the Government and BNOC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North asked whether the Government rather than BNOC was responsible. While consultations occur between the Government and BNOC, the ultimate decision is taken by BNOC. BNOC has an independent board, and the corporation is responsible for proposing prices for the different grades of oil with which it deals. I hope that the House and the Select Committee will not forget that, in evidence to the Select Committee, BNOC's chairman made it clear that there was no difference in the relationship between the Government and BNOC between the spring of 1983 and the summer of 1984. There was, therefore, no introduction of policy and no change of policy or practice in that period.

Mr. Barron: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I have only a few minutes left, and I want to deal with some of the other points raised in the debate.

The action taken in 1983 and in the summer of 1984 was effective. As soon as it was clear that BNOC would not cut its price in July and August, the price quickly became a spot price and returned to a proper relationship. BNOC cut the price only when the longer-term trend to a lower price started to emerge in October. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, neither BNOC nor the Government can be a price leader in such matters. We have to follow the market, but we believe that in the short term we can have some influence.

My hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) referred to the £45 million cost. In my evidence last week to the Select Committee, I made it clear how that amount was calculated. It is worth remembering, as my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, and I fill in the point, that for every pound lost by BNOC over three quarters has been recouped directly by the Inland Revenue through incrased petroleum revenue tax and corporation tax paid by BNOC's suppliers. The cost to the Exchequer is about one quarter of the total. It is a small sum to pay in relation to the more general benefits and in relation to the higher cost to the economy which would be caused by the short-term destabilisation of prices.

What overshadows events to some extent at the moment, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, is the OPEC meeting this week. One of the most important things to remind ourselves is that not all oil is suffering from a weak market. The spot price for the world swing crude, the Saudi Arabia mix, is not far from its firm price.

One of the most important problems to which I hope OPEC will address itself this week is that of differentials. Until that is resolved, it is difficult to form a proper view of the way in which prices may move in the future. There are other uncertainties. There are uncertainties about stocks. Current commercial stocks are down to about 71 days' supply. That is below the 1978 level when the Western world was generally ill-prepared to resist the reduction in Iran's oil supply.

Although we sometimes make fun of it, there is the weather. The third week of December last year saw one of the strongest firmings of prices. As I said to the Committee last week, decisions should not be taken in advance of knowing the conditions——

Original question deferred, pursuant to Paragraph (2)(c) of Standing Order No. 19 (Consideration of Estimates).

Industrial Training

8.52 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Peter Morrison): I beg to move,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 3rd December, be approved.

The House will recall that at about the same time last year a similar order concerning the construction industry training board was laid before the House. It was debated and approved unanimously by both Houses. The present order similarly requires parliamentary approval in accordance with the Industrial Training Act 1982 because one part of it involves a levy of 2 per cent. on payments made for labour-only subcontracting.

I hope that the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) will agree that it is important to ensure that all except the smallest firms contribute to the costs of training. We must do everything we can to ensure that we are not bedevilled by skill shortages, as we have been in the past. That is why I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is essential that the order is approved so that the money will be available for the board for grants and the necessary training within the industry.

The levy is expected to raise a total of about £42·5 million. An occupational levy is proposed on the main part of the construction industry. That is a set amount for each occupation but subject to an overall limit of 1 per cent. of employers' wage bills.

As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, occupational rates vary according to the type of craftsmen trained. The board believes that that system reflects the extent to which it meets the training needs of various categories of workers. Levy rates, therefore, reflect the specific training costs and needs of each occupation in the industry. I am pleased to say that the occupational rates remain largely unchanged from last year.

It may be appropriate if I were to say a word or two about the board. As hon. Members will be aware, the board was retained following the general review of training arrangements for which I, as the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Employment, had responsibility in 1981. It was retained because it enjoyed widespread support from industry and employer organisations. I have worked closely with the board since then, and I believe that its performance has justified this support. The chairman of the board, Mr. Leslie Kemp, his staff and all his board members, employers, trade union representatives and educationists have done sterling work. I should like to pay tribute to them for what they have done in making the youth training scheme in their industry such a success. I have today laid before the House the board's annual report for 1983-84.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Federation of Master Builders was represented on the board in June last year for the first time. I welcome that representation. I am sure that it has an important role to play on the board. It is a sensible move because I have talked to its representatives, at length, about training within the industry.

There has always been a consensus in the industry on the board's training proposals. That was demonstrated clearly last year. This order follows proposals adopted without opposition by the board, which were approved by the Manpower Services Commission, which decided that they are necessary to ensure proper training in the industry.

However, from letters that I have received from many hon. Members, it is clear that there is still some anxiety about the proposals. The Federation of Master Builders wants to change to a payroll system of levy. Other employer organisations would reject that and say that it was tried in the 1960s and did not prove to be the best way to do things. They maintained that it proved inequitable.

All other employer representatives on the board support the proposal. I have received many letters supporting the proposals from organisations such as the Building Employers Confederation, the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, the Construction Plant Hire Association, the Electrical Contractors Association and the Heating and Ventilating Contractors Association.

As I said, there have been many representations from both sides of the industry. What I have said consistently to the board and to the interested parties is that it would be much better for the future if such matters were settled within the board and not by the Government. I hope that the interested parties will be able to sit around a table to discuss the best way ahead for the years to come, because they know their industry better than I do or, dare I venture to say it, anyone of us in the House.

I hope that as in the past, the board will be able to reach an agreement that will be in the interests of training for the construction industry. I know what an important role that industry has to play in the nation's economy.

I hope that hon. Members will agree that the order is necessary to bring in revenue vital for the board to meet the industry's training needs. I trust that the order will enable the board to play a significant role in the Government's training plans, especially the youth training scheme and the other objectives of the Government's new training initiative. I commend the order to the House.

8.58 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): The construction industry training board levy order has almost become part of our Christmas season. Immediately before the House rises for the Christmas Recess one of its last tasks is to approve the proposals of the industry's training board, which have already had the seal of approval of the Manpower Services Commission. The one difference this year is that tonight we are debating the order at a more reasonable hour because of a happy chance of circumstances—normally we debate it after midnight.

The Labour party does not oppose this or similar orders because, unlike the Tory Government, we are strongly in favour of industrial training boards, and still bitterly regret the narrow dogmatism that brought about the abolition of many training boards about three years ago. The Minister will recall that because he was in charge of the legislation.

I wish to renew the commitment of the Labour party to the principle of re-establishing industrial training boards for most sections of British industry when we are returned to power. The Labour party believes in the massive expansion of training and educational opportunities for young people, unlike the present miserable Administration, who think only of harrying our young people into compulsory youth schemes, no matter how dead-end, unskilled or repetitious and boring they may be.

The imaginative training schemes prepared and implemented by the CITB are the sort of schemes that we

wish to establish for all our young workers. We wish to provide schemes that give them a solid start in learning about their industry, a first year of good, off-the-job training and a further two or three years of training at work in their chosen skills. I join the Minister in paying tribute to Sir Leslie Kemp, his board and all who work hard in the CITB to make a success of training in industry.

Normally the order comes to Parliament from the board without controversy. It has usually been thrashed out in the industry through joint talks between employer and employer, trade union and trade union, and employers and trade unions. That is absolutely right. Most agreements in industry should be reached after full discussions between employers and free trade unions with the minimum of interference by central Government. That is what good industrial relations are about. It is time that the Government realised that and shaped the whole of their industrial relations policy accordingly.

However, it cannot be said that this order has come to us free of controversy. A major section of the industry, the Federation of Master Builders, has spent a great deal of time and money seeking to change the entire basis of the method of collecting the levy payments. It is important to note that the FMB, which, generally speaking, represents smaller builders, is not challenging the levy itself, but merely the levy's basis.

It is also important to note that if the case of the FMB was accepted and the levy was switched from a per capita basis, as it is at present, to a payroll levy, as the FMB proposes, it would represent financial savings for the majority of members of the FMB. It would also mean an additional financial cost to the majority of large firms which make up the Building Employers Confederation.

The Labour party is not taking sides at this stage because we feel that the matter should be sorted out, if possible, by those who work in the industry. Yesterday I was given information that the CITB had established a working party, one of the purposes of which is to examine the method of obtaining the levy. Another purpose is to examine the feasibility of construction industry apprentices being indentured to the CITB, rather than to individual employers. I shall return to that later.

I was informed that the chairman of the working party was to be a long-serving CITB member, Mr. Coatsworth, who is an academic, and that the FMB would be free to refer any other matters relating to the board's income and activities to the working party. However, today I heard from another source within the industry that that may not be quite the whole story. It has been suggested to me that some of the board members thought that the working party was to be established for the sole purpose of considering the problem of indenturing apprentices. My source told me that a working party was held a relatively short time ago, which returned with a hybrid proposal combining some elements of a percapita levy and some elements of a payroll levy that went some way to meeting the objections of the Federation of Master Builders and was broadly acceptable to it.

However, it is alleged that that proposition has disappeared. Nothing further has been heard of it, and the fear has been expressed to me that any working party set up now would be used as a delaying mechanism further to circumvent the demands of the master builders. I ask the Minister for a guarantee that the working party will be established quickly and that it will report quickly. Most of the data are readily available. If the working party recommends changes in the levy that are acceptable to the board, I hope that they will be implemented in next year's order. I say that because, on its face—I accept that a detailed investigation may reveal much more than is being said now — there is some validity in the FMB's submission that there is an imbalance in what its members pay in levy and receive in grant and what the large civil engineering contractors pay in levy and receive in grant.

While I am on the subject of small and large firms, will the Minister confirm that when the construction industry training board is reconstituted in 1985 the trade unions will retain parity with the employers on the board, and that the FMB's membership will be increased so that it is more fairly represented?

I shall now deal with another aspect of the board's income and relate it to the training of apprentices. I have been given to understand that, in 1984, the total income of the CITB was about £84 million. Of that, about £45 million was raised by the levy on employers, and no less than £35 million was income from the Manpower Services Commission for youth training schemes run by the CITB. About 18,000 or 19,000 youngsters are part of CITB youth training schemes, thus making it one of the biggest participants in the YTS. Indeed, I am led to believe that the entire first-year trainee intake in the construction industry was Government-funded youth trainees. Will the Minister tell me, if not tonight by writing to me later, how many of those trainees went on to enjoy full apprenticeships in the construction industry? That important information should be available to the board and to the Minister because of the claims made by some Ministers about the number of YTS trainees who have gone on to full employment.

The majority of CITB youth training schemes are praiseworthy; if all youth training schemes were of such a calibre, we would not have the ridiculous spectacle of Tory Cabinet Minister seriously suggesting that young adults should be deprived of their pitiful £17·30 supplementary benefit if they refuse, for example, to pack supermarket shelves for £25 for a 40-hour week. The Government should provide the choice and opportunity of training, not the Hobson's choice of youth coercion or empty pockets.

Another serious point is that some people in the construction industry have raised the question of the industry's apprentices being employed by the CITB instead of by the individual employers. In a television interview yesterday, the Prime Minister said that she was in favour of a two-year training scheme for all those aged between 16 and 18. The introduction of such a scheme, funded by the MSC, would go a long way to bringing about the highly desirable policy of all apprentices being indentured to the industry's training board. That would end the appalling and frequent spectacle of young apprentices being thrown onto the dole halfway through their apprenticeships when their employers go into liquidation — a not uncommon happening in the construction industry. I assure the Minister and the House that if the Prime Minister institutes a comprehensive and well-financed two-year training scheme she will have my and my party's fullest support.

The background to the debate on this order is the announcements today from the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales of the substantial cut in capital expenditure by local authorities which, whatever else they do, amount to another massive

[Mr. John Evans]

setback for the construction industry, which is already laid bare by the successive blows that it has received from the Government. I did not hear the Secretary of State for the Environment deny that his announcement would mean redundancy for some 100,000 workers in the construction and related industries.

The question, "Training for what?" is entirely relevant in this industry today, and it is undeniable that a substantial amount of local authority expenditure finds its way straight into the private building sector. Because of these announcements, there will be a further crop of closures and bankruptcies of building companies that will not be able to pay the levy to the board, which will further reduce the board's income. The construction industry training board faces a difficult, if not bleak future. It needs all the goodwill in the world, and it has the goodwill and best wishes of the Labour party in its work. That is why we shall not be opposing the order.

9.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this short debate. I make no secret of the fact that I have received the strongest representations from firms and individuals in my constituency on one aspect. What I shall now say reflects the approaches which I have received from these interested parties, but nevertheless they are views that I accept and endorse personally, without qualification.

My first point is one of regret. I regret that debate and contention have entered into the construction industry levy board's affairs. In this respect, I welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Minister a few minutes ago. As I understand it, the proposals now before us were agreed to at a training board meeting in April. I further understand that in course of time the Manpower Services Commission approved the proposals, which were duly recommended to the Secretary of State. I am told that no objections were made by the Federation of Master Builders until a few weeks ago. This "holding of fire" is hard to understand, let alone applaud.

Representatives of the building industry in my constituency, not least two respected local firms, H. N. Edwards and Maurice Smith, have told me that other organisations represented on the levy board have publicly urged the Federation of Master Builders to try to resolve this dispute by means of discussion within the industry. It is sad and unfortunate that the federation has declined this invitation.

My second point is that the case being made by the FMB—I do not derive any satisfaction or pleasure from entering into dispute with the federation — contains weaknesses and flaws, as I understand the case which has been put to me. As we know, the federation bases its argument—the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) referred to this—on the belief that the present dual system of levy arrangements — the per capita system and the raising of levies on labour-only payments — is unfair to smaller builders. That view is not generally shared in the ranks of the small builders.

The Federation of Master Builders does not have a monopoly of the interests of the smaller builders. As I understand it, all other employers' organisations represented on the levy board support the per capita system. Furthermore, the Building Employers Confederation, among others, has convincingly pointed out the fallacies in the Federation of Masters Builders' argument that small builders are being penalised by the present system. It should be remembered that companies on the training board register whose annual payroll is less than £15,000 a year are specifically exempted from paying all the levy. The significance of this increases when we bear in mind the fact that the smaller companies receive over £3 million a year from the board in training grants.

Much the same applies to companies with an annual payroll of between £15,000 and £30,000 a year. About £1,500,000 is raised in levy from such firms. That is a considerable amount, but all but 5 per cent. is returned in grants. Surely that creates no burden. Indeed, on 27 October, a written answer revealed that about 83 per cent. of the levy is handed back to companies of all sizes in training grants.

If we bear those facts in mind, and not least the fact that the majority of small firms are not members of the Federation of Master Builders, the federation case begins to look flimsy. The Building Employers Confederation believes that many small firms would actually pay a higher levy if the percentage-of-payroll system were introduced. If that is so, the federation argument is self-defeating.

The employers confederation claims that the federation has overlooked the fact that substantial amounts of training board levy come from self-employed operatives. About two thirds of the total levy from the building sector is being raised this way this year. The counter-charge against the Federation of Master Builders is simply that it has got it wrong. The present system does not penalise or victimise the smaller builder.

The levy order should be made without delay. I accept some of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans). It is hard to over-estimate the importance of the construction industry to our economy. Likewise, it is hard to overstate the importance of the training board's work. I think that I have a sympathy for training boards with which the hon. Member would approve.

The training board is, among other things, the largest single managing agent of the youth training scheme. If the levy order were not made, or if it were even delayed, confidence in the training board would be affected profoundly. Firms have already undertaken training in the expectation of receiving training board grants. Their financial difficulties would be acute.

A delay in making the levy order might compel the training board to draw on its reserves. That could have disastrous repercussions. It could damage the board's successful YTS programme. If the board were compelled to draw on its resources, it would encounter severe problems in continuing to run its four training centres which are attended by 20,000 trainees a year.

For those reasons, set out briefly, I believe that the order should be approved.

9.18 pm

Mr. Bernard Conlan (Gateshead, East): The comments by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) are astonishing in some respects. He explained that his interest was aroused by representations from constituents who were members of the Federation of Master Builders.

Mr. Hunter: I did not say that. The people to whom I referred were not members of the Federation of Master Builders. I am sorry if I gave that impression.

Mr. Conlan: I apologise. However, the hon. Gentleman denounced the proposals by the Federation of Master Builders.

I take part in the debate simply because of representations made to me by members of that federation. I was impressed by their case. The hon. Member for Basingstoke said that their case had been put only in the last few weeks. That is not so because they have made that case for many years.

The Minister conceded that the federation, in spite of representing 20,000 small and medium-sized firms in the building industry, had no representation on the board. It was only because of the generosity, understanding and sympathy of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister of State—I pay tribute to the part that the hon. Gentleman played as well—and the feeling of a need to give representation to the federation that it was given, belatedly, one seat on the industrial training board. That one seat was balanced by one additional seat for the trade unions.

The case for the payroll levy has been advanced by the federation over a long period. I pay tribute to the work that the board undertakes. It is doing an extremely fine job of work in providing training in a difficult and complex industry and I pay tribute to both sides of it, but that does not mean that we must accept everything that it does. If some of my remarks appear to be critical, that is not because I condemn the general view that the training boards for the construction industry and many others are indispensable. I make these remarks because I think that changes are required urgently.

It is admitted readily that there are fundamental differences of opinion within the industry on the method of raising the levy. The federation goes for a straight payroll levy, which would be simple to administer. However, there are others who differ fundamentally with that approach. When the Conservative Government came into office there were 24 training boards and there are now a mere seven. It is astonishing that every other training board, with the exception of the offshore petroleum ITB, raises its levy by the payroll method. The offshore petroleum ITB has an entirely different system which is possibly even simpler. It relies upon contributions that are made by its member firms. Only the construction ITB has a convoluted, difficult to administer and confusing method of raising a levy. Not only that, it is controversial.

It is not only the Federation of Master Builders that is crying out for changes. The Minister said last year that every member of the training board was in support of a per capita levy but he did not go that far this evening. He said that the proposition was approved by the board earlier this year without objection.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I think I said that the order came forward following proposals that were adopted without opposition from the board.

Mr. Conlan: I suppose that we are playing with words. Does "without opposition from the board" mean that members of the board supported the recommendations on a split vote? Did they divide? Were there any dissenting voices within the board when it discussed the matter? That is all I am saying. I am surprised that the Minister can come here tonight and say that there was no opposition from the board. Is that so? The Minister nods, so it must be. I am surprised to learn that.

Mr. Hunter: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should not be surprised if he bears in mind the fact that the Building Employers Confederation has demonstrated that a levy based on the percentage of payroll would mean a greater levy being imposed on smaller companies.

Mr. Conlan: I understand the difficulties. The larger firms object to paying more, but the basis of the argument is that the larger companies, under this arrangement, are not paying enough and the small firms are paying too much and doing most of the training.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Much of the argument is related to the levy. Surely the real thing is the balance between the levy and the grant. It is the difference between the two that is important. When I was responsible in the furniture industry, we made a profit on our levy. Therefore, the argument about the levy in isolation to the grant is a non-argument.

Mr. Conlan: I readily admit that the two are related. I shall come to that point later.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): If my hon. Friend gets the chance.

Mr. Conlan: That is a matter for Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The proposal for a payroll type of levy is not new. It existed in the industry until 1970, and still exists in every other training board. The Manpower Services Commission, in a letter to the industrial training board's planning services committee as recently as 1979—only five years ago—asked that committee how soon it could adopt a percentage-based approach in line with the other industrial training boards. Therefore, even the MSC was concerned about those arrangements and was asking specifically whether the training board could move towards a system based upon a payroll rather than a per capita system.

There must be changes. I think that the Minister will recognise that changes must be made. The Federation of Master Builders has been given assurances—I do not know how strong they were — both formally and informally that it would move gradually towards a different system, which would be simpler, more efficient and more equitable. That is all that the members of the federation are asking for. They are not pleading poverty. They will not go round with a begging bowl. They are saying that they are prepared to play their part, to pay their full costs and to do the training that is required of them. That is a fair and reasonable approach.

I understand why there was a move from the payroll to the per capita sytem in 1970—it was because the big civil engineering contractors that do not employ many skilled craftsmen felt that they were paying too high a proportion of the total cost of the board's operations. Presumably, those arguments still apply today. In the industry, building service firms are required to engage and employ a high proportion of skilled labour to carry out their function. They are different from the civil engineering contractors, who manage largely on labour-type operatives. Clearly there is an imbalance. If that is the case, why cannot a method be devised by the industry training board to segregate those elements with a high preponderance of skilled labour from other elements,

[Mr. Conlan]

which largely exist through the use of labour-type operatives? If that could be done, the anomaly of one section of the industry claiming that it subsidised the work of another would disappear.

I am impressed by the words that frequently appear in the papers I receive from the industry training board. Everyone is seeking a solution to this problem, and there are regular calls for efficiency, simplicity and equity. That is also sought by the Federation of Master Builders, and it is a principle that every hon. Member can endorse.

9.30 pm

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): I begin by making absolutely clear how much I support the general concept of the order. I believe that the 1984 legislation, from which all this flows, was in concept and effect among the most successful legislation enacted during those years.

To an extent I must declare an interest, because at one time I benefited substantially from training through an industrial training board. It was not the board that we are now discussing, but the principle is the same. This was a good idea in 1964, and it is a good idea now. I am delighted that this board is very much alive and well, and so far as I am aware, no hon. Member from any quarter of the House is arguing that it should be abolished.

There is merit in training. I cannot recall any economy on this great planet in which the difficulties with which a government have had to deal have been caused by too many skills and too much training among their work force. Even in the situation we now face, when manifestly one fears there is not enough work to employ the skills available, I would argue vigorously that we should prepare for a recovery. The nation would do itself a service if it concentrated more of its mind and its resources on training and an improvement in general skills. I am a bit of a training fanatic. It is good, and those who encourage it deserve praise.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Mr. Conlan) referred to the argument, of which we are all aware, about whether this should be based on payroll or per capita. As a layman looking in from outside, my conclusion is that there is much to be said for a payroll levy. That is a fair and sensible way of reflecting the size and significance of various companies, not to mention the value they place on the skills they employ. What better sign of a company's value of a skill can there be than what it pays the personnel involved? Having read the arguments, I see strength in the case put forward by the Federation of Master Builders. In principle, therefore, I believe that the arguments it has put forward should be investigated with vigour.

The Federation of Master Builders believes that small firms receive less than their fair share of the repayment and that small firms do more than their fare share of training. The belief is that the smaller firms are making a bigger training contribution than their size warrants but that they are not receiving reasonable recompense for their efforts. My attention has been drawn to a letter dated 6th March 1984 from the head of CITB's planning services. It says:

> "I have looked at the trainee ratios based on levy returns. These would appear to indicate that the smaller firm employs proportionately more trainees than the larger firm".

The letter also states that smaller firms appear to train more than their fair share.

Given the sums of money involved and the number of years that the CITB has been in existence, the inadequacy of the statistics is amazing. The argument revolved around assumptions rather than the statistics which the board could have accumulated over 20 years.

Mr. Conlan: The Minister chided me when I asked a parliamentary question about this problem. He replied that the cost of a reply to the question was £700. So what?

Mr. Penhaligon: I saw that. It might be of interest if all questions asked in this House were costed. There might be times when information is obtained at quite considerable cost—at far greater cost than the value of information obtained. There is observable truth in the argument that smaller firms generally employ people with more skills than do larger firms. I suspect that this is due to the way in which companies plan their work.

There was a time when a working party of the CITB reached a compromise. We are told that that compromise was unanimous. It argued for a mixed per capita and payroll scheme. I have not received a satisfactory answer about what happened to that scheme. The Minister could be very helpful if he could refer specifically to why the compromise agreement of 1972 has never seen the light of day. It has been mentioned twice in the debate and seems to be relevant. It is one of the reasons why some are cynical about yet another inquiry. A unanimous compromise was reached but that compromise has bit the dust.

The Minister will have seen the figures relating to the differences. Small payroll firms—15,000 to 30,000—pay in something like £1·1 million. Under the payroll system that would go down to £0·6 million and under the compromise to £0·73 million. That is nearly £400,000 in terms of the transfer of levy away from smaller companies. That sounds a substantial sum. One would obviously like to hear any counter-argument.

The next band up is the £30,000 to £60,000 a year payroll company. They currently pay £1·8 million. Under the compromise they would pay £1·3 million. Under a payroll system they would pay £1·1 million. One has to get near the top, the £200,000 to £300,000 a year payroll company, before one sees a percentage difference which is less. They now pay £1·6 million. Under the compromise they would pay £1·5 million. Under the payroll system they would pay £1·4 million. One has to get to a turnover of £1 million or more a year in terms of wages, of which there are apparently 750 companies, before there is a significant transfer the other way. They currently contribute £10·9 million. Under the compromise they would pay £12·4 million. Under the payroll system they would pay £13·5 million.

The Federation of Master Builders has at least asked enough questions and made enough points to demand something rather more significant and substantial from the Minister or the training board to explain why the present system is worthy of support.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that from the outside one fears a little bit of conspiracy in the CITB on the employers' side. One suspects that the larger enterprises have a large portion of the say. One fears, or is suspicious, or thinks that it is a remote possibility, that the larger companies may well be in favour of a system which obviously shifts the load down to those who are not strongly represented. I am sure that the Minister has been in politics long enough, as I have, to be familiar with the

situation where sections of an industry decide that the fair arrangement is for somebody else to pay. One fears that there is a tendency in that direction.

It would be interesting to hear the Minister explain why the different levies have been selected. I notice that somebody trained in mechanical engineering is paid £85, and in electrical engineering £75 and that a craftsman is paid £71. I must admit that, as a mechanical engineer, I have always thought that they were far better trained and more value than electrical engineers, but I am not sure that an analysis of the training of the two would back that argument. Why is there a £10 difference?

One of my objections to the scheme is that it discourages the sort of flexibility of skills that are demanded in many building sites. Not all that many people, especially in smaller companies, are employed purely for their mechanical or electrical engineering skills, or purely for their craftsman skills. There is at least a flexibility at the edge. As somebody who believes that we should be encouraging a flexibility at the edge, I think that the levy scheme could well encourage a regimenting of people's skills that I would not appreciate. It seems reasonable to ask why there should be a difference and I would appreciate an answer.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) argued the big companies' case. He referred to the answer which said that 83 per cent. was repaid. I am sure he is aware that it is now admitted that that answer is wrong. The figure is nowhere near 83 per cent. If he looks at the chart from which he got the 96 per cent. figure, he will see that that is the only group that got over 83 per cent. Manifestly, the average cannot be 83 per cent. It must be in the order of 73 per cent. The fact that that answer is wrong — I suspect it is the simplest question of all to answer — makes one a shade suspicious of other statistics.

Another point that is often made is that those companies with a payroll of less than £15,000 a year make no contribution. A company with a payroll of less than £15,000, even with wage rates in my part of the world, probably does not employ three people. We are talking about something small. I stand to be corrected but I am told that that sort of company would often offer to subcontract particular skills on a bigger job. The reality of what happens is that the big contractor collects a payroll out of a part of its labour-only expenses. It is passed on by the bigger company. I do not make any complaints about that. It sounds a good way of getting the money. However, it would be unfair to pretend that a two-man building company does not make any contribution when it is having a percentage of its labour-only contract taken out of its labour contract and paid in by the bigger companies. I suspect that at least some of the apparent generosity is not quite so simple, if one pays nothing and gets £3·9 million back.

I am sure that no one will vote against the order. I shall certainly vote for it because I believe in training. Nevertheless, by dint of persistence, the Federation of Master Builders has put up a number of questions which deserve to be answered in far more depth than hitherto. The quality of argument put up by those who defend the present system is simply not adequate backing for a system entering its 14th or 15th year. I therefore welcome the inquiry, but I hope that it will achieve something better than the conclusions reached when these matters were last investigated in any depth.

9.45 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I had not intended to intervene, but much of the debate, to which I have listened carefully, has concerned finance and very little has concerned training. The two options discussed have been a per capita and a payroll basis. The Government might care to consider whether payment by results would be more in keeping with today's needs.

I speak as a former chairman of the furniture trade industry training board dealing with apprentices in the London area. In my experience the need to pass examinations or to obtain skills was the least important consideration for either employers or trade unions. The most important thing was to ensure that the levy form was filled in and the maximum grant obtained, irrespective of the standard of training achieved by the young person concerned. I suspect that matters are not very different in the construction industry. I doubt whether there is any rule that youngsters entering the industry must go to a training college and achieve a good standard in their examinations before any levy or grant is paid.

All too often, we look at training from entirely the wrong angle. We should be considering whether we are training enough people properly in the skills required for the future. In this context, I commend the attitude of the Electrical, Electronic, Plumbing and Telecommunications Union, which has approached this nationally by encouraging a far larger number of young people to come into the industry and to be trained adequately, the criterion being not whether they have lived long enough or whether the levy has been paid or the grant received, but whether the employers and trade unions are satisfied that the young person is competent to go out into the world and say, "I am an electrician."

I was horrified, though, to hear from the Labour Front Bench the suggestion that there might be an apprenticeship to the construction industry training board. That is a horrific prospect. Any employer would immediately wash his hands of his apprentices because it would all be the responsibility of the CITB — elected, appointed, or however it might be constituted at the time.

Mr. Evans: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there are strong arguments within the industry that employers should be indentured to the CITB? Far from employers washing their hands of apprentices, the position would be far better than it is now, when every year thousands of apprentices find themselves on the dole queue because their employers have gone bust and there is no other work for them. That would not happen if they were indentured to the CITB.

Mr. Holt: It would still happen if very large numbers were involved, but it would not improve the training of the youngsters, which is the kernel of my argument. We must not argue about money all the time without looking at the skill side.

Mr. Evans: With the greatest respect, that is exactly what the order is about.

Mr. Holt: I understand what the order is about, but related to the order is the work content that goes with it. If you do not understand that, that is a bad thing for the Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I have a very good understanding of these matters.

Mr. Holt: I realise that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise profusely to you. I meant that if the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) does not understand that there is a correlation between the content of training and the money involved, that is hard luck for the Labour party—although we know that the party is in its death throes in any case.

I had not intended to make a political speech. I am concerned about young people. I am interested in their training. That is why I attended the debate. It is a pity that there are not more Labour Members here, demonstrating their interest in young people and in training.

Mr. Evans: It is a good job that there are not more Conservative Members present. They might all have made speeches as appalling as yours.

Mr. Holt: Was that another reference to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was a general reproach, not specifically directed towards the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Holt: I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept that we all want the order to be passed. However, the discussion must not be limited to an argument between two sectors of employers in the industry, and the way in which the levy and the grant are carved up. We must think about the young people and the needs of the future, and make an assessment of what is required. If there is to be an annual exercise of filling in forms and seeking to maximise the amount of money that can be received back by way of grant to set against the levy, irrespective of whether the youngsters involved ever do any of the jobs required of them or attain any skills, the country will be in a bad way.

It is time for a thorough investigation, taking in more than the CITB. However, I want to use this debate as a coat-hanger for discussing all elements of training. When I was responsible for signing indentures, together with the responsible trade union official, our only criterion was whether the person involved had lived long enough. The young people did not have to pass any examinations or present any work. I suspect that that is true in the CITB to this day. Before we say that someone is an electrician, a bricklayer, a joiner or a plasterer, we should ensure that indentured apprenticeships are meaningful and that the financing of the apprenticeship is a secondary and not the primary consideration.

9.53 pm

Mr. Peter Morrison: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) that the debate should be about training and about the quality of training in the construction industry. I also agree with his comments about standards as opposed to time-serving. A greater emphasis on standards is one of the objectives which the Government—and, I believe, the CITB—wish to attain as quickly as possible.

Inevitably, the debate has been about the altercation —if that is the right word—between the two employers' associations in the building industry. In my opening remarks, I was at pains to express my hope that the industry would be able to sort out its own training problems. Like the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) I hope that in the weeks and months ahead the working party to which he referred will sit down and work out the best way in which to proceed. I do not believe that the House is best qualified to find a solution. I believe that it would be much better for the industry to do so itself. In the meantime, I will do what I can to bring the parties together, as I have tried to do during the past three months.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) expressed his regret that there should be a debate between the two employers' associations. Such differences of opinion are an inevitable fact of life. We must look to the future — as does the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Mr. Conlan)—rather than to what may have happened in the past. I hope that the parties concerned will look to the future and try to resolve their differences of opinion.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) said that he is glad that the board is alive and well and that he is a training fanatic. Having been responsible for these matters, first as an Under-Secretary of State and now as Minister of State, for nearly four years, I cast myself in the same category. I believe that training is incredibly important. It is an investment which should be hoisted high on the list of priorities. The hon. Gentleman and I are at one on that. He asked about the occupational levy. Different occupations get different levies and the industry, through the boards, decides what the levy should be for each occupation. I hope that he agrees that the best people to make that decision are employers, trade unionists and educationalists rather than he or I, who are not working so closely with the industry.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North started by being somewhat controversial about the youth training scheme. I suppose that we have grown accustomed to that but his remarks were somewhat misplaced. The scheme costs the taxpayer about £800 million, the trainees believe that the scheme is impressive and constructive and yet the hon. Gentleman said, in the context of the CITB, that it has had an amazing outturn figure. Of the 18,000 or so trainees who were last year under the CITB managing agency, some 90 per cent. who have completed their training have gone on into further skills training. I wonder whether he is able to point to such a good record at any time between 1974 and 1979 when his party was in power.

Mr. Evans: Did the Minister not understand that I was not criticising the youth training scheme as it affects the CITB? I was criticising the many other schemes such as the packing of shelves in supermarkets, which are an abuse of training schemes. I suggested that every scheme should be as good as the CITB one.

Mr. Morrison: That is interesting. The hon. Gentleman would have us not approve the youth training scheme when the managing agency is Sainsburys where, if my memory serves me correctly, there was a 500-place scheme, after which virtually 100 per cent. went into a job. The hon. Gentleman does not like that either. The hon. Gentleman must substantiate what he said. If he does not like such schemes on which the placement rate is so outstandingly good, I must report that that is what the Labour party feels.

I am sure that industry has listened carefully to what the hon. Member for St. Helens, North said about the re-introduction of statutory training boards. I hope that, on consideration, he might think again. Surely he agrees that training is better done if it is done voluntarily, whether in a statutory or a non-statutory system. It is better done because it is done with conviction and commitment. I am

delighted that the hon. Gentleman commends the order to the House — it is for the good of training in the construction industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 3rd December, be approved.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions which he was directed by paragraph (2)(c) of Standing Order No. 19(2)(c) (Consideration of Estimates) to put at that hour.*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1984-85

Class IV, Vote 5

Question,

That a supplementary sum not exceeding £45,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in the course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1985 for expenditure by the Department of Energy in connection with the energy industries including related research and development, selective assistance to industry, energy conservation, oil storage, and certain other services including grants in aid and an international subscription.

put and agreed to.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1984-85

Question,

That a further supplementary sum, not exceeding £2,988,733,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray charges for Defence and Civil Services which will come in the course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1985, as set out in House of Commons Papers No. 7, 29 and 101.

put and agreed to.

ESTIMATES, 1985-86 (Vote on account)

Question,

That a sum, not exceeding £40,938,087,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1986, as set out in the House of Commons Papers Nos. 8, 9 and 28.

put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Peter Rees, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Barney Hayhoe and Mr. Ian Stewart.

CONSOLIDATED FUND

Mr. John Moore accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31 March 1985 and 1986; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 41.]

Heavy Lorries

10 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 4088/79, 9292/81 and 9508/84 and the unnumbered Draft Directive submitted by the Department of Transport on 13th December 1984; and notes with satisfaction the position adopted in relation to the Draft Council Directive on the weights, dimensions and certain other technical characteristics of certain road vehicles.

I apologise to the House for the short notice given in arranging this debate. The Scrutiny Committee recommended debates on weights and dimensions in 1979 and 1981 when the first two documents mentioned in the motion were deposited. During the intervening period, the Government have stuck firmly in the negotiations in Brussels to the undertaking on lorry weights given in the House when the regulations were presented just over two years ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). He stated:

"We do not accept the higher limits proposed by either the European Commission or any other European body. We also reject the higher limits on axle weights, because they would not be acceptable on our roads."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1982; Vol. 32, c. 1022.]

The draft directive has been on the agenda of every Council of Ministers meeting since then, but, despite provisional agreements earlier this year on some parts of the directive, it was only last week on 11 December that an agreement was reached on a modified package. The urgent need to settle the matter now arises not because of anything in the weights and dimensions package but because of the linkage between the package and agreements to increase the Community quota for road haulage and to allocate moneys under the infrastructure fund for 1983-84. This goes to support some of our most important road schemes. This money will cease to be available if it is not paid by the end of this year, and hence there is the need for the debate tonight.

We are not seeking to overturn the commitment given in 1982 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford. We are not asking the House to agree to increase the maximum lorry weights for any type of lorry. I would not recommend the directive if it contained proposals to allow heavier lorries on our roads. The directive does not do so, because we have successfully obtained a derogation in respect of weights for ourselves and the Irish which is of indefinite duration. Moreover, there is now no prospect of increased maximum weights being imposed on us by majority decision of the Council without approval by Parliament. The directive makes it clear that any future decision on this subject can only be taken by unanimous vote; thus our position in Europe on lorry weights is actually strengthened.

The terms embodied in the draft directive were obtained as a result of hard bargaining in Brussels last week. They represent a deal which I recommend the House should endorse. The position is as follows. The United Kingdom is not yet committed to this directive. Last week, nine member countries indicated that they were ready to accept the directive, together with the derogation to which I have referred. Knowing the great interest that the House has taken in the subject in the past, I said that I would have

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to submit the terms to Parliament, and our European colleagues accepted this. So the position of this House has been fully preserved.

The directive sets only lower limits on the maximum weights or dimensions that a member state may permit. It does not, therefore, require a member state to reduce any limits to conform to the Community values. The directive applies only to vehicles when used in international traffic; thus member states can continue with their national rules governing the registration and type approval of vehicles. All they are required legally to do is to admit vehicles in international traffic if they conform with the weights and dimensions set out in the annex.

I come now to the weights proposals themselves. First, the detailed weights limits, apart from those on which we have secure derogation—of which more in a moment—either agree entirely with the limits in current United Kingdom regulations or are in fact lower than our own limits. This is an excellent result for us. It means for example that many of the trailer axle weights and spacings with which our operators are accustomed and to which our manufacturers build are to become the common European standard.

There is only one significant change that we will have to make to our regulations before July 1986 when the directive comes into force. This concerns not weight but the maximum length of rigid, non-articulated, motor vehicles, now specified as 12m, compared with 11m in our regulations. In fact, the vast majority of rigid vehicles — generally the lighter two-axle lorries — are built substantially shorter than 11m anyway, so the maximum length limit for this type of vehicle has little effect. It is possible that some specialised vehicles, such as furniture vans, will become up to a metre longer if the industry finds it worthwhile to exploit the opportunity provided by the change in our regulations. The change will bring the length limit on these vans into line with the existing 12m length limit on coaches. Such rigid vehicles will remain much shorter than the heavier articulated vehicles already in use on our roads. There is thus no increase in the maximum size of lorries, and none of the proposals for increased weights, other than those which are the subject of our derogation, would differ from weight maxima currently allowed.

The crucial article for us is article 8. This provides the United Kingdom — Irish derogation. This is the new feature in the directive that did not exist in the Commission's earlier proposals. It results from our insistence over the past two years, following Parliament's decision in favour of a weight limit of 38 tonnes for the United Kingdom that we were bound by our pledges to Parliament. The ninth "Whereas" clause and article 8 set out the terms of the derogation. I can assure the House that these leave the United Kingdom Government and Parliament fully entitled to maintain our current limit for the heaviest lorries, for as long as we see the need to do so.

Our Community partners have now accepted, after a good deal of persuasion, that we indeed have a genuine problem with our older bridges. The fact is that the 40 tonne lorry in its commonest form—the two-axle tractor and three-axle semi-trailer—inevitably has axle weights which are significantly higher than those for which our bridges have been assessed. We cannot permit such lorries to use our roads in their present state. A lengthy programme of work would be needed before we could even consider accepting these heavier axle loads on our roads and bridges.

The first paragraph of article 8 sets out the scope of the derogation. The first subparagraph means that 40 tonne limits for articulated vehicles and road trains and the 24 tonne limit on the most widely spaced tri-axle, do not apply in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The second subparagraph means that we must none the less accept articulated vehicles of 38 tonnes with a tri-axle of up to 22·5 tonnes. Those are in fact our present limits, so this causes no problem for us.

The second paragraph makes it clear that the derogation applies without limitation to "Road Trains", that is, drawbar trailer combinations also. This means that the United Kingdom can maintain its existing limit of 32·5 tonnes on drawbar trailer combinations. Thus we continue to honour the commitment in its entirety.

Maintenance of a lower limit on these large drawbar trailer lorries was a provision upon which Parliament insisted in 1982, and despite the fact that this was the hardest of all for our Community partners to swallow, the Government have insisted, successfully, that it be covered by the derogation.

In terms of bridge loading and road damage there is no sound justification for maintaining a lower limit on road trains than on articulated vehicles—indeed, the reverse. The effect of this provision in practice is to discriminate against foreign operators who make greater use of these vehicles than British hauliers. Maintenance of a lower limit on road trains was nevertheless a provision upon which Parliament insisted in 1982, and therefore the Government have insisted that it be covered by the derogation.

The second paragraph of article 8 requires the Council to lay down a procedure for the periodic review of the derogation. A proposal must be made by the Commission within the next 18 months, and the Council has to make a decision by 28 February 1987,

"According to the provisions of the Treaty."

But the preamble—that is the 9th "Whereas" clause—makes it clear that our Community partners have accepted that the part of the treaty of Rome relevant to this decision is article 75, paragraph 3, which provides for unanimous decision. So the United Kingdom retains complete control over these arrangements. We cannot have higher limits forced upon us by majority decisions. If the Council fails to agree upon the terms of the review procedure by 1987, the derogation remains in force.

Therefore, there is nothing in the directive which is harmful to our interests. It has to be said that the benefits are not dramatic either, but they are worth having. The degree of standardisation helps our exporters, although only a minority of goods vehicles is covered. It is also valuable to agree common standards on certain weights and dimensions, such as the weight upon unpowered axles, the trailer weights and the dimensions of the biggest vehicles, which will discourage any upward drift in national legislation elsewhere in the Community.

Those are limited benefits. The main benefit we seek is to have a common market in road haulage. We believe that it is profoundly unsatisfactory that the largely free market in goods that exists in the EC does not extend to the services sector—especially to transport. It is quite intolerable that, 27 years from the start of the Community

and 12 years after our own accession, lorries such as ours, which meet all the national standards of other Community countries, should nevertheless be subject to strict quota restrictions and be unable to make journeys in the EC without a permit. We have not succeeded in getting a firm timetable for the abolition of quotas as yet. But we shall keep trying.

Meanwhile, at last week's Council, we got agreement to more than double the Community lorry quota over a five-year period from 1985 to 1989. That is a major step forward, which will offer considerable opportunities to our road haulage operators. The increase is linked by other EC Governments to our adopting the weights and dimensions directive. It stands ready for adoption tomorrow, but only if the weights and dimensions directive is also ready for adoption then.

There are other worthwhile measures that are also dependent on the directive as part of the same package. The regulation on the 1983-84 Community infrastructure programme includes support for the construction of the M25, the Sidcup bypass, and rail electrification in Essex. It means a total financial net benefit for the United Kingdom of about £1 million. There is also a resolution on road safety which provides for 1986 to be European Road Safety Year, and there is a minor recommendation on co-operation between the Community's railway undertakings. All these measures will go through as a package with weights and dimensions, or not at all.

There is much more to play for in the longer term. The European Council has already agreed, at summit level, that the Common Market in services must become a reality and that road haulage must be liberalised. It will take a great deal of pressure and hard negotiation to secure progress against the instincts of most member states. The United Kingdom economy stands to reap substantial benefits if this is brought about. There will be absolutely no prospect of achieving this aim if we were not to agree to the weights and dimensions directive tonight.

I commend the directive, therefore, to the House as representing a modest but significant success in our negotiations towards a Community transport policy. We remain totally committed to the undertaking given in 1982 that there should be no increase in the maximum weight of heavy lorries until our roads are suitable and Parliament agrees. We are achieving the beginnings of a movement towards liberalisation of road haulage throughout the Community, and those elements of harmonisation which we can agree to will be of value to our exporting manufacturers. I hope that the House will approve the directive.

10.14 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is reprehensible for the Secretary of State to present such a major change to the House so late in the Session and so late at night. My reasons for saying that are simple. There are various ways in which the Government can make changes following European legislation. One way is to consider not the political implications, but technical specifications that can be harmonised, knowing that they will have a knock-on effect on road safety and road haulage measures in Britain. I am extremely unhappy that we are talking tonight about something which the Secretary of State has represented as a modified package, and as something that we must accept or we will not get the linkage which he says exists between the infrastructure fund and the other Community measures. The implication is that if we oppose the measure we shall be holding up the money that the Secretary of State has obtained from the budget for other transport measures.

If that is the case, we should consider carefully what the directive says. We should understand the background to it. In 1971, before Britain joined the Community, the EC sought an agreed lorry dimension scheme. In 1972, the Six agreed on some aspects, such as a 40-tonne limit, but the entry of the three new nations delayed complete agreement. In 1975, the idea re-emerged and proposals were put forward in 1976.

The Secretary of State said that the Government have given undertakings and that no one need worry because the Government will do nothing to damage British interests. That is extremely difficult to believe. The Commission is being taken to the European Court of Justice by those who believe that it is not implementing quickly enough a harmonised transport policy. The case will be heard before long. Therefore, when we talk about Britain having obtained a derogation from some basic aspects of transport policy, we must understand precisely what is meant by a derogation.

In January 1979, the main new proposals appeared for agreed lorry dimensions. The report wanted a 44-tonne limit, but that was cut to 40 tonnes in September 1981. The Government agreed to that, but the House forced them to back down to a limit of 38 tonnes. As I said, one method of moving towards agreement has been to obtain agreement on technical details. That is a useful ploy, because it reduces the number of options on lorry weights so that we impose uniformity in a different way.

On 17 and 18 September 1984, the European Parliament took the Council of Ministers to court because the latter was not implementing the treaty obligations. The Advocate General will give his opinion on 8 or 10 January 1985. That is one reason why the House is being asked to move too quickly.

Britain has some of the smallest lorries in the EC, and until 1982 the weight limit, which was set in 1964, was 32·5 tonnes. The Netherlands had 50-tonne trucks at that time. Britain also had shorter lorries than did most EC countries. Today, only the United Kingdom does not have the 18m long lorry. It is clear that United Kingdom drive axle weights are at the low end of the scale; they are 10·5 tonnes in Britain compared with 13 tonnes in France, Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. The Commission's proposal is for an 11-tonne axle, and that was the suggestion put forward in 1972 by the Six. Traction ratios are higher by 20 per cent. in the Netherlands and 27·6 per cent. in the United Kingdom, but when there are icy conditions even the 34·2 per cent. of France is not considered adequate by the Commission.

The Government have tried, in a number of ways, to increase lorry sizes. Their White Paper in December 1981 made a lot of claims about protecting the environment but they are unfulfilled. We were told that bypasses and motorways would be the Government's high priority and local authorities' powers to control lorry movements were meant to be a major safeguard. If that is so, I ask the Secretary of State why he has been so exceedingly vocal about the GLC's attempt to impose a lorry ban, a ban that many people in London not only desire but need if they are to be able to lead a civilised life. This Secretary of State has been a party, with his colleagues, to the abolition

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

of many of the local authority aspects of transport, but he is nevertheless demanding a full inquiry into the GLC's proposed lorry ban. If that is not illogical, what is?

Sir John Wells (Maidstone): Is the hon. Lady aware that, if the GLC lorry ban were to be imposed, wholesale markets in London would grind to a halt? Heavy lorries come from the fish ports and the meat and horticultural areas night after night and go directly by main road to the market areas, where virtually nobody lives. No Londoners are disturbed by those markets and the freshness and the cheapness of food in London depends on those lorries. The plan is crazy.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I have the greatest respect for the hon. Gentleman, but he cannot be talking about the same capital city about which I am talking and he is not talking about the reality of the movement of lorries in London.

Sir John Wells: Yes, I am.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My point is vital. The Secretary of State says, on the one hand, that what concerns him is protecting the environment but, on the other as soon as any suggestion is made that a properly elected council should seek to do that, he demands a public inquiry.

This is rather more complicated than simply saying that the EEC understands that we have problems with lorry weights because of our roads. The Secretary of State says that it would not be right to go as far as the Armitage report suggests and that the Government have rejected the 44-tonne maximum, but the regulations will create an environment that will allow that change. The EEC accepts only that where there are bad roads there should be a small increase in pavement thicknesses, and that bypasses and a great deal of money spent on new roads are not required. These are not my views, but those of the EEC.

Therefore, the Government should tell us how they will avoid problems in 1987. We have already gone above the weight at which lorries cause a great deal of damage to our roads, which is 35 tonnes. These proposals will make it hard to avoid increasing the problem.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I take it that the hon. Lady believes that the axle loading and the weight on pavements and roads are the really important things for the protection of the environment. What does she believe will be the axle loading under these proposals?

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the hon. Gentleman does me the minor courtesy of waiting until I develop my argument, he will find out what concerns me. The Secretary of State seems to find this amusing. Let me spell out to him what the proposals will mean for our people, because he appears to be concerned only with the views of the operators and not with the views of those who will have to live with the changes which are brought about, or those who will not find themselves new bypasses or new roads to protect their villages or towns.

The regulations do nothing to deal with overloading. Many drivers coping with container loads have difficulties, not only with weight but with the way in which vehicles are packed. The Council of Ministers does not consider the variety of roads and conditions here. Accidents happen, not only because of the speed of vehicles, but because they are badly loaded. The slow roll, arising from a change in direction, can result in a lorry shedding its load. There is a safety problem in the change.

Momentum can have an effect in a bad road traffic accident. Extra weight has a direct effect. If I remember any science at all, it is that the momentum of a body is affected by the force with which it moves. An increase from 38 tonnes to 40 tonnes will mean that if there is a road traffic crash——

Mr. Ridley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I look forward to the Secretary of State's interventions with what I can only call wild delight.

The Government are wrong to claim that extra weight does not affect accidents. Believe me, I know what I am talking about. An increase in weight directly increases momentum. The increase from 38 tonnes to 40 tonnes means that a crash happens with 5 per cent. more force. In the M25 crash last week, nine of the 22 vehicles involved were heavy lorries.

Mr. Ridley: Did not the hon. Lady hear me say that the directive does not involve an increase from 38 tonnes to 40 tonnes? After the directive is adopted there cannot be such an increase against our will. There is no point in arguing about 40-tonne lorries, because they are not dealt with in the directive.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State knows that there will be an increase in length. He knows that we are talking about 18m being the maximum. That is like taking three mini cars piled on top of each other, and sticking them on the back of the biggest lorry in Britain.

Mr. Ridley: We have had 18m lorries in Britain since 1941. No changes are proposed in the maximum length of lorries. Again, the hon. Lady is falsely interpreting the directive.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State insists that no basic changes are to take place, but his argument depends upon the Commission continuing to accept that Britain's roads are so bad that they cannot accommodate increased lorry weights. My point is simple. If we want to harmonise legislation throughout the Community, the easiest way is to introduce technical specifications which will have an effect upon the lorries and the movement of transport. That is what will happen under the directive. We cannot get away from that.

Drivers are worried that road safety has not been sufficiently considered. They are convinced that loading problems will be considerable. They are certain that the basic problem is that the Community intends to push ahead with the harmonisation of road transport. That has been its attitude ever since Britain entered the Community, and everything that it does has that aim in mind.

We are in danger of being told that these are small, technical changes and that we have obtained—the Secretary of State boasted of this—a derogation that is indefinite in length. He did not say that the Commission has managed to write in various limitations, which I believe that it will impose at the end of 18 months. It is talking about a move towards complete harmonisation of road transport. That is not in the interests of our environment or of our road traffic industry. There are many in our towns who will have considerable worries about the proposals before us.

Heavy Lorries

10.31 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his opening speech on this contentious issue. Anyone in his right mind and with an appreciation of the industrial and commercial necessity of heavy lorries would not say that they should all be banned. However, there is a great public resentment of heavy lorries, which pass through villages and despoil urban areas. Although heavy lorries are an integral part of our communications and industrial system, they have few friends. In Britain generally, villages are shaken and violated by heavy lorries, which over the years seem to have grown in size if they have not in reality. They have certainly increased in numbers. Pleasant urban areas are disturbed by the continual passage within them of heavy lorries and town centres are jammed almost constantly by them.

Apart from the resultant road damage, we can cope with the overall problem in the longer term—it is one which continues to increase—only by the strict adherence to routes by heavy lorries. These routes should not be confined to motorways or dual carriageways. There must be a proper appreciation of exactly where lorries can go and of loading and unloading times. As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, there is overloading, and it amounts to an abuse which must be checked.

The European Economic Commission, as opposed to the Community, is much less popular than it used to be, and it was never a particularly popular animal. The same applies to the Community. There is too much bureaucratic rule. I do not like the idea of a great deal of harmonisation of roads and transport and lorries and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is taking the right attitude. This Government, and any Government, will rue the day when they accept a course that leads to complete harmonisation with the rest of Europe. If that happens, large areas of Britain will be despoiled.

10.34 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I congratulate the Secretary of State on sticking to his guns and returning from Brussels without giving ground on his predecessor's undertaking that the 38-tonne limit will be maintained.

I listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said about the duration of the derogation. Article 8 says that there will be some investigation between now and 30 June 1986 and that a report will be submitted to the Commissioners. Will we be able to hold the line after 28 February 1987, which is when a decision on the report must be made? Having heard today's announcements, we are not likely to spend £100 billion on bridges in the meantime and, therefore, we might be able to get away with it. If, by chance, the Minister of State gets her way and we spend rather more on our roads, it will be rather more difficult to do so.

The Secretary of State has achieved quite a lot under the article. It is worth while that we should be moving towards a further liberalisation of the various controls covering road transport apart from the weight limits. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to say a little about what we are doing about safety enforcement. It is still a bit of a bad joke in this country. Weighbridge facilities are still inadequate. Not all our major ports have weighbridge facilities, even now, and daily weighing cannot be carried out even where there is a weighbridge because the number of staff is inadequate. I am told that in many cases they are manned only between 9 am and 5.30 pm.

Therefore, there are things that we can do to improve the situation. However, having said that and asked the Secretary of State about safety enforcement, I at least am relieved to know that he has honoured the pledge that his predecessor gave to the House.

10.35 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's courageous stand on lorry weights. There was hardly any newspaper in Britain, before he went to Europe, that believed that he would argue the case for the lorry weights that he succeeded in achieving. Almost everybody said that he would give in to the 40-tonner, and I believe that the fact that he did not shows not only the Government's views but my right hon. Friend's strength of purpose.

However, I must add that the last line of the Government's package refers to encouragement for lorry routing and action areas. When the M25 is complete, there will be the facility for a wide change of policy within the context of the City of London and the Greater London area. The Greater London council has proposed a lorry ban, and it would be unwise for my right hon. Friend to ignore its popularity in some of the areas that have been particularly plagued by heavy lorries over the past few years. When the M25 is complete, many lorries will be able to avoid the centre of London—I mean not just lorries of around 38 tonnes, but much lighter lorries than that. I agree that the axle weight of 7·6 tonnes per axle that my right hon. Friend succeeded in achieving as opposed to the old 8·125 tonnes per axle is an advantage, but I also agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about momentum. In a domestic area with side roads, heavily built up, with slow traffic, small domestic cars, people crossing zebra crossings and with right angles such as are found on the south circular, the momentum of lorries gives rise to fears among the local inhabitants. When the M25 is complete, there should be a proper series of lorry zones dictated throughout the whole of the Greater London area to encourage lorries to go round rather than through London.

With regard to competing with our European neighbours, heavier lorries will bring more freedom of trade in the national context, but there must be the infrastructure to carry those lorries and encourage the trade that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends would like to see. The purpose of my speech is simply this. Many roads upon which our lorries now travel are totally inadequate for the purpose. It is because of political cowardice and incompetence in the past that we do not have the infrastructure that we need to carry the lorries that will help us to compete with our European neighbours. Lorry zones, lorry routes and lorry bans are the product of the fact that we do not have the lorry system that many of our neighbours have developed over the years.

We have heavy loads, heavy lorries and dense traffic. I encourage my right hon. Friend to make a statement in which the Government's intention to take lorries outside London once the M25 is complete is given clearly and unequivocally to the constituents whom I represent. To

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

make too wide the hours that are dictated by the GLC lorry ban and too rapid their introduction can bring only a failure of the GLC lorry ban. As I have said before, I believe the GLC lorry ban to be politically sensitive but popular. However, its introduction has been brought about more by politics than by the needs of my constituents. Further, the hours during which the ban operates are so wide as to cause deliberate friction with central Government.

There is no doubt that a lorry ban of sorts would be popular, but the hours of midnight to 6 am would be more sensible. My right hon. Friend should consider a restriction on lorries, not just within the 65 per cent. of historic towns but within historic London, which at present is subject to blight. Many London bridges should also be free of heavy lorries. I suggest that on Kew bridge alone, a lorry limit of 16, 14 or 12 tonnes is an acceptable maximum in such a conservation area.

My right hon. Friend should give close attention to a lorry ban. A public inquiry may be needed, and I believe that it would show that many of the routes traditionally used by heavy lorries in London are totally inappropriate. Lorry disgorging points should be built on the M25 to allow smaller lorries into our metropolis, although heavier lorries should be banned.

My constituents do not care a jot that heavy lorries are safer. These vehicles are totally inappropriate for domestic side roads. While I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the limit he has managed to achieve from Europe, I ask him to go even further.

10.41 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Even as a London Member, I shall not follow the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) in his support for the GLC, welcome though that might be.

This matter has been before the House for some time. The Select Committee on European legislation saw the first proposals in the 1978-79 Session, and the explanatory memorandum it then considered was signed by one William Rodgers. There have been a number of Secretaries of State for Transport since then, and these proposals have evolved, not least because of some of the efforts of the House of Commons.

I understand that the negotiations on the whole package were completed as recently as 12 December. The document which emerged from that meeting is the one to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred, although there was some debate between him and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about its exact merit.

We are grateful for the efforts of the Secretary of State and his Department in getting this document to the House, but it is a pity that there is no explanatory memorandum. I should have thought that from 12 December until now —it could even have been drafted on the aeroplane—it would have been possible to produce an explanatory memorandum. It may be that the document was not in its final form, and perhaps I am doing the Secretary of State an injustice. My point is that the timescale for the House to debate this final package has been pretty tight. I do not necessarily blame the right hon. Gentleman, as that may be the nature of Community legislative machinery. If so, we should mark and note it. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will refer to the explanatory memorandum when he replies as that may cast light on the disagreement between himself and my hon. Friend.

The Government may have been somewhat coy in their signposting of this debate. Last Thursday, the Leader of the House said:

"Tuesday . . . Debate on European Community documents on transport measures. The relevant numbers will appear in the *Official Report*."

The draft regulations have been before us for some time. In italics at the bottom of the column—but only seen on Friday by Members of Parliament, let alone by anybody else—we read:

"*(d)* Unnumbered draft directive submitted by Department of Transport on 13 December 1984". — [*Official Report*, 13 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 1207.]

It is to that proposal that I now turn.

The Minister and my hon. Friend have argued about the worth of this derogation. I shall therefore read paragraph 9 into the record:

"Whereas the state of certain portions of the road network in Ireland and in the United Kingdom does not make it possible at the present stage to apply all the provisions of this directive; whereas the application of some of these provisions in those member states should therefore be temporarily deferred under arrangements to be set by the Council in a decision to be taken by the end of February 1987 at the latest; whereas it is not possible to fix these arrangements in the present directive; whereas in view of the requirement for substantial improvements to the relevant portions of the road networks which will take a certain number of years to complete, the conditions referred to in Article 75, paragraph 3 are at present fulfilled in those member states and are expected to remain so that when the Council takes its decision; and whereas in consequence this decision will then be adopted by unanimous vote".

I do not intend to embark on any exegesis of that text, but all the qualifications ought to be noted—the reference to "expected to" and to the road network not making it possible at the present stage to apply all the provisions of the directive. The Minister or his successor may be able to provide a watertight defence, but the problem does not relate only to paragraph 9. Linked with the Minister's statement is the statement that the legislative document, which ought to stand on its own merits, is clearly linked to other matters, for example to the electrification of the railways. I do not understand why a legislative instrument should be linked with cash handouts, whatever their merits. What financial inducement or pressure might there be in 1987? It might be linked to putting up £1·4 million to £1·6 million. Package bargaining in the EEC is now fashionable.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): And always has been.

Mr. Spearing: Yes. It has even crept into the document we are discussing. The Greeks want something for Mediterranean products and are holding up expansion. When the House is faced with a request for an increase from 38 tonnes to 40 tonnes, it may be wrapped up in a vast financial package and we shall be unable to do very much about it.

I do not wish to be too fanciful. Members of the Conservative party know of the predictions made by certain of my hon. Friends. It is also true to say that some of my speeches have proved to be an underestimate rather than an overestimate. Therefore, the argument between my hon. Friend and the Minister is thoroughly justified. History is on the side of my hon. Friend.

10.48 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I do not intend to follow Labour Members through the lurid realms of conjecture. I shall just stick to the directive.

As one who has driven a heavy goods vehicle — a 40-ft articulated truck — from London to Doha, and helped pioneer the overseas routes to the middle east, I welcome the measure. I do so for four reasons.

The first aspect that I welcome is the flexibility in hours that the measure provides. That is important and it is about time that it came in. The second aspect — a minor measure — relates to the funds available for infrastructure. Thirdly, I particularly welcome the measure for the deal that has been arrived at on weights. That deal, for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State fought and which he won, allows for the reduction of axle weights and additionally will continue to keep noise levels of vehicles down. It should reassure both urban and rural dwellers.

Above all, I welcome the measure for the increase in permits. It is ridiculous that British haulage has been put at a severe disadvantage, vis-a-vis French, German or Dutch hauliers, because of the few permits that are issued to British hauliers. I am delighted that permits are to be increased by 30 per cent. in the first year and 15 per cent. thereafter, to an increase over four years of 100 per cent. I should like to see the complete scrapping of the restrictions on permit numbers.

Finally, I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to ensure that companies and lorry drivers who offend, particularly those who persistently offend, against the weight regulations, are given stringent fines. The vehicles and drivers should be arrested until those fines are paid. In order to assist him, I should like to see the more widespread introduction of small portable electronic weighbridges which the police can carry around in trucks to check lorries which they think are overloaded.

This is a modest but excellent measure and I hope that the House adopts it.

10.51 pm

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): With respect to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for whom I have a good deal of affection, I have never heard her, or any other Front Bench spokesman on transport, make a speech that went so wide of the subject matter of the debate. I had a feeling as I was listening to her that she had either picked up a crib that had been prepared for the debate four years ago when we stopped the 40-tonne limit, or that she had an anticipatory brief that had been prepared for the debate that may take place 18 months from now. Whatever the provenance of her brief, it was not related to the derogations that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has brought back from Brussels.

My right hon. Friend has done rather well. I did not expect that he would succeed in persuading the Community partners that there should be an indefinite ceiling on weights, an indefinite limit to lengths, that he would also, while achieving those two surprising results, bring back a little extra in quotas, and permits, and that he would get a little bit on the side for the M25, and a little bit more for the electrification of the railways in Essex. Taking the package as a whole, the House should congratulate my right hon. Friend, and not, with respect to the hon. Lady, try to fabricate some sort of attack out of thin air.

I want to make three quick points. The first is that occasionally somebody in the House should say a good word for the heavy lorry. I have a rural constituency. I am just as much concerned about the impact of heavy lorries on villages and towns as anybody else. But it is a beast of burden. It is not the lorry that is the problem, but the fact that it gets mixed up with people, because we have not as yet been able to build enough bypasses and new motorways and we have not succeeded in making lorries sufficiently clean, safe and quiet in their operation.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will find some opportunity to tell the House—not in any detail—of the progress that is being made on the quiet heavy lorry, on the new safety arrangements, particularly against jack-knifing in the case of articulated vehicles, and also the progress that is now capable of being made in providing for more efficient and smaller weighing apparatus. Perhaps we could hear more about the technical progress being made in improving the lorries themselves.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend spoke of the additional permits that he had wrung out of our European partners, but is he confident that the French Government, in particular, will honour them? Sometimes permits are available in theory on a Community-wide basis but in practice are not forthcoming from France.

Thirdly, and more generally, I believe that no Community country has more to gain than we have from a common market in services. If we can move fairly swiftly towards a common market in transport, we shall gain almost five times the potential market on the continent that any European country will gain here. That is the relative size of the market available, so it must be right for us to venture down that road.

Personally, I feel almost a sense of shame that British Transport Ministers constantly have to go to Brussels, as I did a long time ago, to make these appeals because we have a road and bridge system that is not up to the traffic that we seek to place on it. In the long run, the answer is not to stay away from the Common Market in transport or to object to harmonisation of lengths, widths and axle weights but to improve our infrastructure so that we can enjoy the benefits of a true common market in heavy vehicles.

10.56 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) contained exactly the same contradiction as that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. At the end of his speech my hon. Friend proclaimed his belief in a true free common market in services and transport, and I agree with that. Earlier in his speech, however, he sought to defend a differential between the United Kingdom and the Community in terms of lorry weights. One cannot have both.

The overwhelming argument for free movement of lorries and a true common market in services emphasises the fact that the derogation secured by my right hon. Friend is temporary in nature and, when it comes to the crunch, will not protect us aginst 40-tonne lorries. That fundamental contradiction in the case put by my right hon.

[Mr. Roger Moate]

Friend the Secretary of State is the reason why the House should view with great suspicion and indeed reject the proposition before us today.

Only two years ago, after immense debate, the House concluded in favour of a 38-tonne limit—not a two-year stay of execution. I appreciate that it is a matter of conjecture, but I believe that there is a danger that we are now being asked in effect to agree to a stay of execution for two years. We did not vote for such a derogation two years ago. We voted for a 38-tonne limit. At that time there was no Community agreement on 40-tonne or 44-tonne vehicles. The proposition was that we should fight for a Community compromise in our direction, but that is not what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has now secured.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has conceded the case for a European 40-tonne lorry and secured a two-year derogation for this country. He claims also to have gained the victory of a power of veto after that, but it was always our view that we had such a power on matters of fundamental national importance. We were assured time and again that that was the position, so what extra gain has been achieved?

As the hon. Member for Newham South, (Mr. Spearing), who chairs the Select Committee on European Legislation, pointed out, we should consider the matter in its context. We are told that what the Government have achieved is part of a good package, and that that is why it has taken them so long to bring it before the House. We are told that we should, therefore, accept it. I suspect that in two years we shall be told the same thing.

We are agreeing, together with Eire, to be the odd man out in Europe. That position is not one that can be sustained for any time. My right hon. Friend knows that. I suspect that he does not even want to keep out the 40-tonne lorries. He emphasised that he accepted the fact that there had been a decision by Parliament two years ago. However, the weight of his argument seemed to be in favour of the economic case for the 40-tonne lorry—and, of course, there is an argument for the 40-tonne lorry.

The terms of the derogation are essentially temporary. Effectively, it will last until we have improved our road network. Intellectually and in logic, we are conceding the case. We have secured only a two-year derogation. That is not what we argued for two years ago, and we should not accept it tonight.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that it was reprehensible that the arrangement should have been brought before the House in such a hurry. I agree with her. She also argued that the decision would result in further damage to the environment. I agree with her on that, too. I will call the hon. Lady's bluff. If she will vote against the motion, I will join her in the Lobby.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I should be very happy to join the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) in the Lobby. As always, we may be a distinguished few, but what we lack in numbers we shall make up for in quality.

Mr. Moate: I am delighted that the hon. Lady takes that view. I feel strongly that we are being asked to make an unfair decision, given the time factor that is involved. In the next couple of years the pressures on us from the Road Haulage Association, the Freight Transport Association and many other bodies will increase. The pressure not to exercise the veto will be immense. In two years Parliament will be presented with a package that we are told is too good to refuse.

It was unfair of the Government to present us with this package tonight. I understand that the Select Committee considered the question on 12 December, about a week ago. Presumably—I judge from the documents—the Committee did not know of the deal that my right hon. Friend did in Europe on that day or the day before. Hardly a week later, we are presented with this package, without much background information, an explanatory memorandum or much newspaper coverage. If we assent to the motion, the agreement will come into effect tomorrow.

After only a few days, we are being asked to accept the proposition of a Community regulation for 40-tonne lorries and 11-tonne axle weights, with the simple defence that in a couple of years we will have the right to a veto.

I am not opposed to heavy lorries. I recognise the importance of an efficient transport industry. I believed, however, that we had settled on the weight of 38 tonnes. We have now conceded that before long we will take a further step to 40-tonnes. Before long, there will be a return to the Armitage report and the European proposition of a 44-tonne limit.

There will be inexorable pressures from the lorry lobby and the Department of Transport, and, as sure as we are here tonight, we shall soon have a 40-tonne proposition.

If there is an opportunity to vote tonight, I shall be delighted to vote against the motion. There are not many hon. Members in the Chamber—this is an unlikely night for rebellion—but in a few years I am sure that people will look back to see who was wise enough to vote against what is not the thin end but the thick end of the wedge.

11.4 pm

Mr. Ridley: With the leave of the House. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was a little grudging in her understanding of this rather minor package. She was suspicious to a degree about the motives behind what I admit is a rather rushed procedure. In no sense does the matter arise because the European Parliament is taking the Council to the European Court. That has nothing to do with it. So finally it became possible to get this package last week. I hardly think that it will affect anything that the European Court might wish to say. I should like to make it clear that we asked the House to consider the directive tonight because we put a parliamentary reserve on the agreement. The agreement was not altogether expected but we got it and, having held up our colleagues in Europe through the parliamentary reserve, it seemed right that I should ask the House if it was content with the directive. There is, in the language of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), a package. It is a good package because it includes the increase in quotas, which several of my hon. Friends have recognised as valuable to us and the money for the infrastructure, which is a net gain. It is unusual for us to have that from the Community. As I intend to show, fears about weights and dimensions are quite groundless.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Secretary of State prepared to tell us whether, if the European Court ordered that the directive become law because it believed that none of the existing derogations was acceptable under the treaty,

Britain would have to comply with that law? Is it not possible that that decision could have been taken on 5 January?

Mr. Ridley: The answer is no. The European Court cannot order the Council of Ministers to do anything.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: I have answered the hon. Lady's question.

Mrs. Dunwoody: No, the right hon. Gentleman has not. With the greatest respect, does the Secretary of State accept that the European Court has the right, when it believes that the treaty is not being complied with, to make a decision that overrides British law? Will the Secretary of State be honest about it and accept that we might be ordered to comply?

Mr. Ridley: I have said it once and I say again, that the answer is, no. The hon. Lady is in a dull and gloomy mood tonight. I do not know what is eating her. Perhaps I can cheer her up by saying that there was a possibility, before this directive, that the Council of Ministers might have got so fed up with our refusal to move on lorry weights that it could have made a majority decision to impose a 40-tonne limit on Britain. I assure the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), who is also suspicious——

Mr. Moate: Quite rightly.

Mr. Ridley: I do not know what is eating him. We have an extraordinary alliance between my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and the hon. Lady. They are to have a secret rendezvous alone in the No Lobby. There is no need for that. They can go to much more congenial and convenient places than the rather gloomy and dank No Lobby. I do not advise that. I am happy to tell them that the agreement makes it virtually impossible at any stage for the Council to impose a majority decision on us in regard to lorry weights.

I know that the hon. Member for Newham, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham wanted assurances. For two and a bit years, until February 1987, there is no pressure on us. The Commission will review the state of our roads and report by February 1987. It will then be up to the Council to decide whether to set a target date for deciding whether our roads are adequate. We shall have the right, by unanimous decision, to decide to accept it, or not. There is no question of waiting two years and then it will all start. The power of veto will remain with us for all time, if we wish it to do so. The hon. Member for Newham, South asked about the meaning of article 75(3) and the words "expected to". I admit that it is a clumsy procedure, but no other article can be legally applied in the circumstances of this directive. To ensure unanimous voting, article 100 was not appropriate, and we therefore had to use article 75(3). If the hon. Gentleman sees exactly what that article says, he will see that we have obtained exactly what we want—the right to unanimous votes at that time. If the hon. Gentleman had been with me in Brussels, he would have realised how long and hard it was necessary to fight to include that sentence in the directive and he would not now question it.

I shall not discuss the GLC lorry ban, because it has no connection with this directive. I have heard my hon. Friends' comments about that matter.

I should like to consider our progress with civilising the lorry. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) asked about bypasses. We have given high priority to opening bypasses, opening 48 in the past five years with more under construction. Extending the motorway network and building bypasses are some of the main objectives for the remainder of this Parliament. By the middle of the 1990s we hope to build more than 140 bypasses. We have encouraged local authorities to build bypasses and to make sensible use of their powers to ban lorries. During the past four years, about 90 local bypasses have been started with financial assistance from the Government. A 1982 survey showed that 2,200 local lorry bans have been introduced in England and Wales. As more towns and villages are bypassed, there will be more scope for those lorry bans.

The hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) and my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington and for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) asked what the Department is doing about overloading. The number of lorries that were weight checked by the Department's traffic examiners last year was 60 per cent. higher than two years earlier. That is a large increase. It has been made possible by installing 50 dynamic weighbridges, and we plan to install another 30 as soon as we can. That is a massive increase in equipment.

The other day, I visited one of the massive weighbridges and saw the major operation on the M1, taking selected lorries and checking them, not only for weight but defects of all sorts. After talking to many of those lorry drivers, I am certain that they know perfectly well that it is risky to drive overweight vehicles and that they are likely to be caught if they do. I hope that I can assure hon. Members that we are doing a great deal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) asked about the M25. I am certain that, when completed, it will take a great many lorries away from his area and London. We shall certainly do all we can to think of ways of attracting, persuading and encouraging lorry drivers to take to the M25 and leave the other roads. There is great scope for local authorities to introduce local lorry bans. I hope that, when the M25 is completed, every local authority will use that route to find opportunities for more local bans or restrictions to persuade lorries to use the M25.

Lorry bans and how best to get lorries out of places where they should not be is better done locally by the boroughs and district councils. That will be helped when the GLC has been abolished because those powers will then devolve to the boroughs. That is another good reason for abolishing the GLC.

The hon. Member for Newham, South asked why the draft directive was not numbered and why there was no explanatory memorandum. The draft directive is not numbered because it is different to the one that was before us at the beginning of the meeting. I make no apology for changing it drastically. I am sure that the House would sooner have the one that I changed which, by the time it reached here, was still not numbered, rather than the numbered one which was not finally adopted by the Council.

Shortage of time made the explanatory memorandum so late that it would have been of little value to hon. Members. I shall make a note to try to ensure that we have one on future occasions.

Mr. Spearing: I was in no way criticising the lack of a number. If the Secretary of State reads my speech in *Hansard*, he will find that I went out of my way to thank him and any other authorities for supplying the document at short notice. He will have noticed that the report of the Select Committee is dated 12 September. An explanatory memorandum might have enabled some of the disagreements in the debate to have been ironed out. I believe that an explanatory memorandum could have been laid Friday or yesterday without too much difficulty.

Mr. Ridley: I accept that point. I know that the hon. Gentleman does a good job for the House scrutinising all these documents and we shall try not to transgress in future.

I was grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, East and for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Griffiths) for what they said. I have dealt with some of the points that they made. I do not expect that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds will press me to answer his question as to whether France will comply with the lorry quota weights. We shall try to make it do so. He was wise to point to the advantages of a common market in transport, if only because we joined a common market which we thought would be a common market in services as well as goods. It is in our national interest that we should have access to trade in Europe as it has access to our markets with its goods. We shall continue to press for that.

For the benefit of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham, I say that I do not accept that we cannot have a liberalised system of road haulage in Europe without complete harmonisation first. We have a completely liberal quota-free arrangement between the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Benelux countries with no permits for the circulation of lorries, without having harmonised anything. That works well. It is to our mutual advantage.

I have never accepted that it is necessary to have full harmonisation to have a liberal system of road haulage in Europe. I believe that this agreement, modest though it is, has taken us some way towards a more liberal system in Europe without us having to concede on the harmonisation aspects one iota, which is something that I know that the House would not like. That is why our position has been protected.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 100, Noes 32.

Division No. 57] **[11.18 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cope, John
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Lang, Ian
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, John
Major, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Portillo, Michael
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Spencer, Derek
Stern, Michael
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Waddington, David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tim Sainsbury.

NOES

Barron, Kevin
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Corbett, Robin
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Godman, Dr Norman
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Lambie, David
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Rowlands, Ted
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 4088/79, 9292/81 and 9508/84 and the unnumbered Draft Directive submitted by the Department of Transport on 13th December 1984; and notes with satisfaction the position adopted in relation to the Draft Council Directive on the weights, dimensions and certain other technical characteristics of certain road vehicles.

PETITION

Human Embryos

11.31 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I beg to ask leave to present a petition from the Leamington life group. It contains 2,000 signatures of residents of Warwick and Leamington district. The petition calls for legislation that will forbid all practices that offend against the dignity and right to life of human embryos produced in vitro, such as buying and selling them, discarding them and using them as sources of tissue for transplant or subjects for research or experiment, unless this is done solely for the benefit of the human beings concerned. The petition has been occasioned by the Government's request for public response to the recommendations of the Warnock committee, whose report was published in July. It has my full support. I shall not weary the House with a full reading of what the petition says, but, like a number of similar petitions presented by hon. Members, it says:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation

and ends:

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

County Hospital, Lea Valley

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

11.32 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am grateful for the opportunity to put the case for a new county hospital in the Lea Valley area of Hertfordshire. I shall preface my argument by saying that in my constituency there are no hospital beds for a population of 86,954 in 1981, projected to rise to about 91,000 in 1991. Health care provision for the area is distorted by this simple fact, and it makes proper care for the region that much more difficult by artificially creating stress on the facilities that provide health care for my constituents.

In October 1961, the Cheshunt urban district council produced a report concluding that hospital facilities for the area were inadequate. Although at the time this was thought to be a low priority, by January 1971, the north-east metropolitan regional hospital board had incorporated a hospital for the Lea Valley in its proposals for the future, but reorganisation never saw this proposal become reality.

The reasons that persuaded Cheshunt council over 20 years ago have become even more compelling now. Changes to the local population, both in terms of vastly increased numbers and of age, place greater pressure on existing facilities, and changes to policy have left east Hertfordshire at a severe disadvantage. At a time when, quite rightly, the Government are pursuing a policy to encourage the maximum health care to be provided at district level, circumstances prevent east Hertfordshire district health authority from being able to achieve that.

Part of the problem is of a purely organisational character. East Hertfordshire area health authority provides acute facilities at Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Garden City and Hertford county hospital. The eastern part of the health authority area has no real connection with Welwyn Garden City, whether in terms of education, entertainment, employment, or social services. It relies upon Hertford county hospital as a focus for health provision.

Hertford county hospital opened 150 years ago and with a facade listed as being of architectural or historic interest, is on a small site, which has far-reaching consequences. It means that the hospital cannot provide the full range of services and that it cannot be expanded to do so.

Hertford county hospital has no maternity, children's, geriatric or mental illness beds and no ear, nose and throat or ophthalmology in-patient beds. It cannot become a natural focus for acute services locally. GPs and the public choose to use other hospitals outside the district. As time goes on, the hospital's viability must come into doubt.

The future of Hertford county hospital is central to the provision of health care in the area. The East Herts health authority is firm in its belief that the redevelopment of the hospital would be expensive, restricted and a waste of precious resources.

Although such a development might benefit the residents of Hertford, and to some extent of Ware, it would achieve little for my constituents, who already look elsewhere for provision outside the district.

To allow the county hospital to run down without making provision for a new facility would cause the local population to look to Welwyn Garden, Harlow, Enfield and other hospitals outside the district, which would be

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

forced to develop their services to meet the increased workload. Such a move would undermine the possibility of services being managed and provided on a local basis which was, after all, the purpose of recent changes in the structure of the Health Service.

Statistics underline the problem and the need for action. The district provides acute services for only 45 per cent. of its population. That is an insufficient level around which to locate long-stay and day place provisions for priority services. As a result only two thirds of geriatric patients and one third of psycho-geriatric and mentally ill patients can be treated in the district.

About 25 per cent. of ambulance journeys beginning in the district are to hospitals outside Hertfordshire. That has implications, not only for immediate costs but for the way in which resources are stretched and it limits the capacity of the service.

The treatment of patients outside the district also creates problems for families, GPs and outpatients, who are often faced with long journeys without public transport. Examples of public transport difficulties are numerous. From Hoddesdon it takes 40 minutes to get to Queen Elizabeth II hospital at Welwyn Garden city and there are only four direct buses each day. It takes 26 minutes to get to Hertford with only five buses a day. No direct bus service links Cheshunt to Chase Farm hospital, Enfield. The minimum journey time is 40 minutes. Constituents sometimes spend an hour, or an hour and a half, at a return cost of £2·50.

Public transport is needed most by old people and young mothers—the two groups most likely to need health care facilities. Time and expense cause concern. I do not criticise the quality of health care, but such a situation creates an atmosphere which is the reverse of that which the Government seek to achieve—health care close to local needs.

Other complications arise from the confusion about catchment areas in Hertfordshire. There are defined catchment areas for some services such as mental illness, but they do not exist for other services. Where they do exist, they do not necessarily coincide. I shall give an example. An elderly patient in my constituency would receive hospital treatment in Welwyn Garden city for a geriatric complaint, but in Harlow for a psycho-geriatric complaint. However, if he lived in Cheshunt, which is in the constituency, he would not take either course for he would go to St. Michael's, Enfield, or Highlands, Winchmore hill, respectively. Put next to this, the laws on Sunday trading appear simple. The people of areas served by both the East Hertfordshire district council and the Broxbourne borough council depend quite heavily upon health authorities other than their own.

In Broxbourne, 63 per cent. of the population receive hospital services supplied by the Enfield health authority. In east Hertfordshire, 35 per cent. are served by the West Essex health authority. Any changes in health care policy by these authorities will affect those within the East Hertfordshire district health authority. For example, a move away from in-hospital treatment towards community-based care would have a considerable effect upon the follow-up services which are provided by the immediate district health authority, which in this instance is East Hertfordshire. Such a change in policy would have substantial financial implications for it, yet it has no representation on the neighbouring health authority. That is because the East Hertfordshire district health authority is in the north-west Thames regional health authority whereas Enfield and the West Essex district health authorities are in the north-east Thames regional health authority area.

According to current regional norms, there is a major shortfall of beds in the East Hertfordshire district health authority. The most serious part of this is in the provision for local acute services and psycho-geriatric and geriatric services. This shortfall will become more severe in the next 20 years. In 1981, 12·2 per cent. of the population of Broxbourne borough were over 65 years of age. It is estimated that by the year 2000 this will have risen to 15·6 per cent., while the population as a whole will increase as people leave inner London. It is estimated that it will rise by about 10,000. The future expansion of both Hertford and Harlow and the effects of the new M25 will also have to be taken into account.

The overall picture is clear. Health services in east Hertfordshire, and consequently in the neighbouring health authorities, will be placed under greater strain. If there is a shortfall of hospital services now, there will be an even greater one in the near future. Recent closures have not improved the position.

Over past years, the closure of four hospitals in the area and various reductions in the numbers of beds have been offset only partially by expansion of the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Garden City. The net loss has been slightly fewer than 150 beds, which has put extra strain on facilities such as the Hertfordshire county hospital, which are not sufficiently equipped to cope alone.

Decisions need to be made soon. The north-east Thames regional health authority must make provision for Hertfordshire patients and for the increased pressure that these will cause to resources. Obviously it will have to make decisions on capital developments, which will have implications of a permanent nature and could result in there never being proper local services in east Hertfordshire.

The position is one of considerable concern locally. A week ago I presented to the north-west Thames regional health authority a petition containing nearly 11,000 signatures collected in the borough of Broxbourne calling for a new county hospital. A similar petition organised in Hertford town, containing about 4,000 signatures, has also been presented. Other petitions from the area will be presented shortly. Support for the proposal has been given by many local bodies, including the east Hertfordshire district council, Broxbourne borough council, Hertford town council, Ware town council, East Herts district health authority and the community health council, and various parish councils. Those representing professional groups have also responded favourably. These include the Hoddesdon voluntary services council, which represents voluntary caring organisations in the district, and the Hertfordshire local medical committee, which represents local National Health Service general practitioners. Both organisations have written to me in support of the idea.

For over 20 years this proposal has been under discussion. Locally it is agreed that the best plan for the future is a new county hospital to provide for the people of the Lea Valley. It is, of course, suggested in the north-west Thames regional health authority plan for the acute services. But for so long that is all that it has been—a suggestion. Present arrangements for the Health Service in

the area and the funding that derives from them mitigate against local decisions being made locally. As people move from inner London to areas in the home counties such as my constituency, such problems will be magnified especially if there is not a corresponding reallocation of funds.

One careful look at the future funding of Enfield health authority is enough to confirm that that is not happening, for the planning assumptions for Enfield assume a fall in population. That, combined with the need for efficiency savings, points towards a steady fall in revenue allocation for Enfield, and that is bad news for Broxbourne, which looks to Enfield for services and where the population is increasing. The Resource Allocation Working Party formula bias is weighted towards the number of people attending as inpatients in hospitals. The present lack of hospital facilities in east Hertfordshire means that its funding is distorted. Lack of resources prevents local people from having a proper say in local health care.

The case for a new county hospital for the Lea Valley is overwhelming. The current arrangement not only detracts from local health care but serves to act as an inefficient, wasteful use of resources. The National Health Service is there to serve the community, and that means that it must be capable of responding to the community's wishes. Perhaps the best way to express how a new hospital would help is in the words of the east Hertfordshire health authority's draft operational plan for the next three years, which states:

"The problems of the District can be simply stated. The Authority provides in-patient services for only two-thirds of the geriatric population of the district; half of the acute and maternity population of the district; one third of the mentally ill and psychogeriatric patients . . . Many East Hertfordshire patients have to travel unnecessarily long distances for routine treatment, and ambulance costs are inevitably higher. There are particular problems arising from a situation where the Authority has no direct control over services provided from outside the district, for example, the earlier discharge of patients from a hospital in an adjacent district simply places East Herts community nurses under even greater pressure.

A study is being carried out into the need for a new hospital to serve the Hertford/Ware/Broxbourne area. If it is built, the situation on the eastern side of the district will be transformed. Patients living in Hertford and Broxbourne will no longer be the poor relations, having to look everywhere but their own District for treatment.

However, the timing of the new hospital development is of enormous importance. If this district is to take over responsibility for services for the mentally ill and elderly mentally ill in the east sector by the early 1990s, care for increasing numbers of elderly, provide for more of its acute patients as beds in Inner London, West Essex and Enfield reduce, then the phase of the new development must be operational by or before 1990."

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister understands that the lack of local hospital facilities means that my constituency cannot solve its own problems locally. I trust that he will agree that the provision of a new hospital to serve the residents of the Lea Valley is an urgent requirement that should be implemented as part of the north-west Thames regional strategy, which is about to be issued.

11.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I listened with great care to what my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said about the provision of health services in her area. I was moved not just by her characteristic clarity in putting her case but by the evident demonstration of community concern that she showed, especially through the petition of some 11,000 names in support of the hospital that she and many of her constituents wish to be constructed. The figure of 11,000 is formidable — not quite as formidable as my hon. Friend's majority of 17,000 at the general election over her wretched Liberal-SDP opponent, but none the less a formidable number of signatures — and I am sure that that represents accurately the strength of feeling in Lea Valley about the pressing need, in the view of many people in that part of Hertfordshire, for a district hospital to be constructed.

My hon. Friend raised a number of detailed points about provision for various sorts of patients with various sorts of needs, but she will probably agree that central to them all is the strongly held view—locally at least—that the East Hertfordshire health authority is severely under-provided in terms of health care resources. That was the core of my hon. Friend's argument. The only solution seems to be the provision of a new district general hospital to serve the population. Although such hospitals are desirable, my hon. Friend knows that they do not come cheaply, and £20 million, £30 million or £40 million is the sort of expenditure about which we are talking.

We must first consider the needs of the residents of the area and of potential patients whom it is the purpose of the NHS to serve. Secondly, we must consider the proper planning of health care resources in the north-west Thames region. I take this opportunity of paying tribute to the recently retired chairman of the north-west Thames regional health authority, Dame Betty Patterson, who served for so long and so well, and who laid down the burden at the end of last month. I wish her successor, Mr. Bill Doughty, the very best of fortune in handling a number of problems which will land on his plate in the coming months, one of which will be the item which my hon. Friend has drawn to my attention.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the north-west Thames regional health authority is currently developing its strategic plan for the 10 years ahead. I shall shortly be meeting the chairman of the health authority, and I shall draw to his attention my hon. Friend's views about the pressing need for the hospital to be built. But this will be a co-ordinated blueprint for the co-ordinated development of health care in the region for the next 10 years, taking full account of the resources which are likely to be available.

We will then have a picture of the demand from residents, patients and potential patients, the planning input which the north-west Thames regional health authority must make, and the finance. It is essential that any development in the east Hertfordshire area must be an integral part of the overall plan, because my hon. Friend will know that there will be many competing demands for the limited resources available to the authority.

In the first instance it is for the north-west Thames regional health authority to decide priorities. I do not think that it is possible for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and myself to take planning decisions about the placing of every hospital in England. That is not within the capabilities of the DHSS, based as it is in London. It is for precisely that reason that the regional health authorities are charged with the planning of provision related to the local environment and local community needs. The regional and district health authorities are best placed to make these

[Mr. John Patten]

important planning decisions. I know that that view is shared by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security, who characteristically has come into the Chamber to listen to the closing stages of this debate.

We shall be discussing the strategy for the north-west Thames region with the chairman at the regional review early next year. This is part of the improved accountability machinery that we have introduced, and it has proved an effective way of discussing such issues with regional chairmen.

We firmly believe that within the parameters laid down at national and regional level the detailed planning of the Health Service is best done locally. However, I should like to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne that this is not to say that my right hon. Friends and myself take no interest in such matters. On the contrary, we have taken great pains to increase accountability at all levels in the National Health Service, from the individual unit or hospital right up through district and region to the NHS management board. We welcome the recent appointment of Mr. Victor Paige as the chairman of that board.

This means that plans are best drawn up by those nearest to the planning problems. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not suggest that it would be desirable for Ministers to take decisions in any part of Hertfordshire without taking into account the needs of the local residents and the demands of the local health service. It is that difficult "trick" which the north-west Thames regional health authority under its new chairman, Mr. Doughty, will have to turn in future months and years. If my experience of the last two or three months is anything to go by, Mr. Doughty will soon learn that on every occasion when my hon. Friend meets him she will stress with persistence the need for this hospital to be built in east Hertfordshire. I give that warning to him tonight, for whenever I see my hon. Friend and she stops me I know that it will be, quite rightly, to press upon me the need for this hospital to be built.

The first stage in carrying forward the idea of a hospital in the Lea Valley which my hon. Friend has pressed upon my right hon. and learned Friend and me must therefore be for the district health authority to put forward a detailed proposal to the regional health authority to meet the need which it believes to exist. A great deal of work is taking place in this context, but I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the Lea Valley hospital is at this stage a concept rather than a proposal.

Secondly, nobody has yet worked out how much a hospital such as this would cost, were it to be built in that area. There are estimates of how big it should be and how big it would be and how long it would take to build—although my hon. Friend has suggested the 1990s as the lastest possible date by which she would wish this hospital to be constructed—and precisely where it should be sited. I should be asking the north-west Thames regional health authority to earmark an unspecified sum over an unspecified period to build a hospital for which no plans at present exist if I pressed upon Mr. Doughty and his colleagues the need to build a hospital in the way in which my hon. Friend has pressed her case tonight. A great deal more planning needs to be done before any decisions can be taken.

The regional and local health authorities have set up a joint working party to look at the issues and, in liaison with the neighbouring north-east Thames regional health authority, to draw up definite proposals. I expect that we shall receive their report in April 1985. Whatever its recommendations, there will be time for them to be inserted into the regional strategy which is due to be published next summer, which will allow my hon. Friend to continue to make the points as powerfully as she has made them already about the need to build this hospital. But the cost will be substantial.

Because of the likely costs of a project the size of a brand new district general hospital, in due course the proposals would have to be laid before my right hon. and learned Friend and me to consider. This is a careful, painstaking and very important process. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I could not guarantee tonight sums of money for a Lea Valley hospital, should one be built, until there was a firm indication of cost and of siting and of other proposals which are being made at the same time for other parts of the county by others with an interest. I am seeking not to discourage my hon. Friend from the line that she is pursuing but rather to put before her the stages which have to be passed through before decisions are reached. In all that we shall be helped and guided by what she and other interested parties, such as the Broxbourne district council, have to say. I have seen that council's report and I welcome it.

Ministers in my Department are always pleased to see local authorities taking a keen interest in health matters and joining in debate on local issues. It is essential that health and local authorities work together where and when they can to plan services for the populations that they serve. I am sure that the East Hertfordshire health authority will look carefully at the proposals of the Broxbourne district council and consider them when it draws up its plans.

In conclusion, may I summarise the main points that I have sought to make in what I hope my hon. Friend will not think is a deliberately broad-brush reply to her considerable number of detailed points. I cannot yet give detailed replies to her detailed points because we do not have plans in front of us. There is a concept for a new hospital but there is no plan. The local health authority must first work out a genuine proposal for the regional health authority to consider in the light of its strategy. The proposal will then come before Ministers in my Department. I give an undertaking that I shall meet my hon. Friend, if and when that happens, with any delegation of any size within reason that she chooses to bring to discuss the issues.

I am grateful for the points that my hon. Friend has made. I am glad that she has pressed them on myself and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health tonight. I ask her to continue to press them on the district and regional health authorities within whose area of responsibility the decision on this hospital lies.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (MONEY) (NO. 2) BILL

Ordered,

That in the case of the Greater London Council (Money) (No. 2) Bill, Standing Order 208 (Notice of consideration of Lords amendments) be suspended and that the Lords Amendments be now considered.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

COCOM

1. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, following the recent review of the operation of COCOM, he is now satisfied that the COCOM rules apply equitably to British firms.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): Yes, Sir.

Mr. Stott: I understand that the recommendations come into force when the right hon. Gentleman signs the documents. He will know that the matter has great ramifications and is causing anxiety to a number of hon. Members. Accordingly, will he have a word with the Leader of the House to try to find time to debate the agreements before the documents are signed?

Mr. Channon: The question of a debate is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but I have noticed the desire for a debate in a number of quarters of the House. I would certainly have no objection to that. I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's remarks to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the computer software industry has been one of our most conspicuously successful growth industries? Is he aware that leaders of that industry have expressed serious concern that their export potential might be inhibited if the rules that are suspected to have been agreed are implemented? Can my right hon. Friend give the industry any reassurance?

Mr. Channon: I hope that that is not the case. Industry representatives have been consulted at all stages, and representatives of the software industry were offered the same facilities for consultation as other industries. This is a package. In general I believe it to be in the overall British interest, but if hon. Members wish to raise particular points with me I shall be delighted to look at them.

Mr. Ashdown: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that he told me in a recent letter that he was considering mechanisms for restricting or licensing the export of intangible high-technology assets, which is the coy phrase used to describe the information in people's heads. Will he explain how that could be done except by limiting or restricting the freedom of United Kingdom nationals to move abroad?

Mr. Channon: I do not have that point in mind, but if there is an aspect of that issue that I have not answered satisfactorily perhaps the hon. Gentleman will get in touch with me and I will gladly go into it in detail.

British Leyland (Future Models)

2. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has had any recent representations from British Leyland about the funding of future car models.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): BL's 1985 corporate plan, which I have just received, deals with a number of matters, including the company's model strategy and proposals as to the funding of that strategy from non-Government sources.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my hon. Friend accept that British Leyland has done very well over the past few years, after a difficult spell in labour relations? Now that British Leyland is well founded, will the majority shareholder — the taxpayers, represented by the Government — assure us that we intend to keep a genuine British manufacturer of cars and that we shall not have merely an assembler of Japanese models? That way lies the strength and future of the British motor industry.

Mr. Lamont: That is certainly the intention of the Government's policy, and that is why we have supported British Leyland. As my hon. Friend knows, in the end it must be up to the management and all who work at British Leyland to continue the great progress and to make themselves into a truly competitive British manufacturer.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not another example of voodoo economics for the Government to give the Nissan car company £200 million of taxpayers' money to set up a factory in the north-east and to try to run down British Leyland at the same time? Nissan will provide possibly 500 jobs at a subsidy of £400,000 for every man and woman employed. If we got that in the mining industry, we would be sailing freely.

Mr. Lamont: I am not sure about voodoo economics, but the hon. Gentleman cannot add up if he thinks that that is the assistance that we have given to Nissan. He has a slightly exaggerated view. The Nissan project will not reach full production until 1991, and by then Austin Rover either will, or will not, be fully competitive.

Mr. Roger King: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that for the company to arrange funding for new model development it is essential to have good strong home and export markets? Does he realise that the problems that the company faces with regard to Spain, in particular, have precluded sales in quantity to that country?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade is today answering a

written question detailing the arrangements that will come into force with Spain, and which we hope will lead to an improvement in the situation.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Does my hon. Friend have any plans for further reducing the Government's equity ownership in the British Leyland group?

Mr. Lamont: It has been stated on many occasions that it is the Government's policy to want all the constituent parts of British Leyland to be returned to private ownership.

Grain Exports

3. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department exercises any control over exports of grain which form part of the barter deals.

Mr. Channon: No, Sir.

Mr. Leigh: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency I have 500 of the most efficient and productive cereal farmers in the world? What——

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Heavily subsidised.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) has an advantage in that he is a farmer representing an urban constituency. What is the point of forcing more and more grain into intervention? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that more export credits and restitutions are granted so that we may export grain to the Third world and even to Soviet Russia?

Mr. Channon: I have a suspicion that most of my hon. Friend's question is for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to answer. However, my hon. Friend asked about export credits, and on 3 December we announced that two-year cover is available for grain sales to markets for which extended medium-term coverage is available. Thus, I think that I have gone some way towards meeting my hon. Friend's point.

Small Firms

4. **Mr. Dicks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contacts he has with Ministers responsible for small firms' matters in other countries.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): As the Minister with responsibility for small firms I have met several of my opposite numbers in other countries and in October I attended the eleventh international small business congress in Amsterdam, which is attended by Government Ministers and others concerned with small firms from all over the world.

Mr. Dicks: What account do the Government take of other countries' policies when they are considering policies for small business in this country? Will my hon. Friend give an example of a country which has a particularly good approach to the problem?

Mr. Trippier: We can certainly learn from the experience of other countries, although it is often difficult to replicate that experience exactly, because of the different circumstances that may prevail. However, we can still learn a great deal from the United States, particularly with regard to its attitude towards risk taking.

Mr. Grylls: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to study loan guarantee schemes for small firms in other countries? If so, does he know of any other country in the free world which effectively charges up to 18 per cent. on the guaranteed part of loans, which is the result of the changes that he has made to the loan guarantee scheme?

Mr. Trippier: I particularly studied the loan guarantee scheme when I visited Amsterdam in October. Our loan guarantee scheme is close to that scheme, and is closer to that scheme than to the equivalent scheme in the United States. I also noticed that the Dutch Government were extremely worried about the losses involved in the Government loan scheme—as the Dutch call it—and were possibly going to intervene with the banks to try to reduce the heavy loss rate.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend agree that other countries may have much to learn from us on the subject of policies for small businesses? Does he know that the enterprise allowance scheme is widely welcomed? Is he convinced that there are sufficient funds to meet the demand resulting from that good scheme? Can my hon. Friend give us some figures for the enterprise allowance scheme's success rate in creating jobs?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, but I think that he is suffering from the delusion that the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for the enterprise allowance scheme, when it is not. However, we have an input through the small firms service, for which I am responsible, in monitoring the success of the enterprise allowance scheme. Indeed, that scheme is widely acknowledged to be a success. I understand that at present the enterprise allowance scheme's failure rate is about one in five, compared with a one in three failure rate for small firms generally.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that in the short period that this Question Time has lasted his hon. Friends have asked for support and subsidies for farmers, support for small firms, and support for Japanese car factories? How does that compare with the fact that the Prime Minister and each of the Ministers on the Front Bench is constantly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about small firms,.

Mr. Trippier: In the area of small firms the hon. Gentleman suffers from the delusion of adequacy. The truth is that his knowledge of that subject is incredibly sparse. Had he listened more carefully to the Back Benchers who asked me questions on the subject, he would have realised that they were not asking for support. The success of small firms does not necessarily depend on the supply of money. Assistance with marketing and financial control is equally important.

Libya

6. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the contribution made by trade with Libya to the United Kingdom's balance of payments during 1983 and in 1984 to date; and if he will list the British companies involved.

Mr. Channon: United Kingdom trade with Libya contributed £50·5 million in 1983 and £54·2 million in January to October 1984 to the United Kingdom's visible balance of payments. My Department does not maintain lists of exporters to any market.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister accept that it was nothing more than hypocrisy for the Prime Minister to comment as she did on the NUM's trip to Libya earlier this year when those amounts of money are coming into Britain from Libya? Has any of that money been laundered into the Conservative party?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well the difference between trading with a country, which in no way implies an approval of the regime, because we trade with many countries whose behaviour we dislike, and——

Mr. Barron: That is hypocrisy.

Mr. Channon: It is not hypocrisy. If we traded only with countries whose regimes we liked, we would trade with remarkably few. I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman should repudiate the leader of his party, who, referring to the miners' visit to Libya, said that any offer to them would be an insult to everything that the British Labour movement stands for.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the NUM went to a country which does not allow any free trade unions? Can he shed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about trade, not trade unions.

Mr. Greenway: What trade is likely to have come out of the deal between Mr. Scargill and the Libyan regime?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend has made his point forcefully. None whatever.

Mr. Ryman: Despite the Minister's nonchalant arrogance in purporting to answer questions, is he aware that Her Majesty's Government have broken off diplomatic relations with Libya and that it is therefore disgraceful that, by implication, we should be receiving the Government's approval in continuing trade with Libya? Is he aware, for example, that the National Coal Board is at the moment training Libyan nationals in computer technology, which is easily adaptable for military purposes? Does that not imply a tacit approval of the Libyan regime?

Mr. Channon: The House will be able to judge whether or not I am arrogant. The House can certainly judge that the hon. Gentleman is wrong about that matter. Whether or not we have diplomatic relations with a country, we try not to impede normal exchanges, including normal civil trade, between two countries. That policy was followed by our predecessors just as much as it has been by ourselves.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister satisfied that leaders of Libyan industry who wish to trade with Britain have adequate access to Britain?

Mr. Channon: I have heard no complaints to the contrary.

European Community (Internal Market)

7. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress towards eliminating all barriers to trade in the internal market of the European Community.

Mr. Channon: The Government have taken a leading role in the Council of Ministers in eliminating barriers to internal trade. Yesterday we made a major step forward on simpler documentation for customs purposes—the so-called single administrative document. Other practical measures already secured include many common industrial standards, better opening hours at custom posts and faster clearance of lorries. We shall continue to press vigorously for progress.

Mr. Favell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his achievement yesterday. May we have more details about what the agreement achieves? Will he tell us more about the faster clearance of lorries, which is immensely important to the haulage industry?

Mr. Channon: When it comes into force the single document will replace about 70 forms now needed for goods circulating within the Community. It will reduce and standardise the information which traders must provide and, over a period of years, it will provide savings for traders, Governments and all those involved in trade. I think that it is a step forward which the whole Community will welcome.

Mr. McCrindle: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the European Parliament has called for an investigation into the different approaches of customs officers at internal borders? Does he agree that there are differences of approach which we could do well to iron out if trade is to be maximised?

Mr. Channon: There are certainly differences of approach and there are many historical reasons for them. We are making progress in that area with this document and with the measures to facilitate movement at frontiers in general. We shall continue to do so. I shall consider my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, Mr. Speaker, you must provide balance.

Mr. Kirkwood: It is about time that the hon. Gentleman tried doing so.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is only a whippersnapper.

When the Minister goes to the Common Market to try to dismantle these barriers to trade—[HON. MEMBERS: "We are already in it".] I am talking about the Minister going on a trip on a gravy train. Will he, when he goes have a word with the two clever ex-Commissioners, who, during the last two weeks of their tenure of office, have suddenly become vice-Presidents? They have done that to line their pockets to the tune of a further £2,500 a year in pension payments. It is a scandal——

Mr. Speaker: Order—

Mr. Skinner: —and it is a barrier to trade.

Liverpool

8. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications for selective regional aid have been received from firms having business in Liverpool and by firms intending to set up businesses in Liverpool.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Between April 1979 and September 1984 some 300 applications for regional selective assistance were received for projects in the Liverpool travel-to-work area.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Minister agree that there have been a record number of bankruptcies in small businesses? On a number of occasions I have written to the Department asking for assistance to provide jobs in an area of high unemployment. In view of that, does the hon. Gentleman agree that that shows that this is yet another failure in the Government's portfolio of policies? When will he consider the genuine problems of businesses in that area and ensure that the Government assist them, if that is the Government's intention? This is supposed to be the Government of small businesses.

Mr. Lamont: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman listened to my earlier answer when I said that 182 offers have a value of £32 million. That is only selective assistance. On top of that, large amounts of automatic grants and regional development grants have gone to the Liverpool travel-to-work area. Whatever else Liverpool has lacked, it has not lacked money from the Government.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim: Is my hon. Friend aware of the great resentment in areas which do not receive regional assistance but have high unemployment——.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The same rules apply to all hon. Members. The question is about Liverpool.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my hon. Friend aware that many places such as Liverpool are treated generously compared with other areas of high unemployment, which receive no assistance?

Mr. Lamont: That is no doubt why my hon. Friend supported our decision to cut £300 million from the regional policy budget.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will not Liverpool be hit, like many other regions, by the cut in regional aid under the new regime that will operate? Will not Liverpool, other parts of the north, Scotland and Wales, have less money going into their economies because of the massive cuts in regional aid on which the Government have embarked?

Mr. Lamont: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Liverpool will continue to receive the highest status. It will qualify in the inner tier for assistance automatically. That assistance will be much better spent because it will be much more closely related to the creation of jobs. If we are to spend money on regional policies, it is sensible to relate it to jobs.

Mr. Ryman: Will not the dilemma of Liverpool under the Government's new plans for regional aid be similar to that in many other parts of the country, especially the north-east of England, where, because of a refusal to honour a previous commitment, companies which made plans long ago for capital expansion involving job creation must now change their plans because the Government have peremptorily introduced a new policy on regional aid, on the completely false criterion of travel-to-work areas?

Mr. Lamont: It is incorrect to say that the Government introduced these changes suddenly. There was a long period of consultation. Furthermore, the changes in the map were accompanied by generous transitional provisions which take account of the hon. Gentleman's point that companies may have been in the middle of formulating investment plans. Those are catered for in the transitional provisions

Mr. John Smith: I assume that the Minister considered the position of Liverpool carefully in anticipation of answering this question. How much less money will be available to Liverpool as a result of the recent changes in regional development policy? What does it cost to create a job in an enterprise zone?

Mr. Lamont: I cannot answer either question.

Mr. John Smith: Why not?

Mr. Lamont: We have not made an estimate of how each area will be affected by the changes in regional policy. Expenditure on regional policy is demand-led and depends on companies putting forward projects, as it always has. It is impossible to make an assessment for each travel-to-work area.

British Industry (Shareholdings)

9. **Mr. Christopher Hawkins** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has plans to seek to promote wider ownership of shares in British industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Alex Fletcher): We have just completed the biggest single step so far this century towards wider ownership of shares in British industry. More than 2 million people purchased BT shares, including many first-time investors and 184,000 employees of BT. We shall continue to encourage wider ownership of shares by employees and by individual investors.

Mr. Hawkins: Is my hon. Friend aware of the pleasure that most Conservative Members feel at the success of the British Telecom sale? Is he further aware that we hope that the Government will pursue a policy of extending share ownership to a wider proportion of the British public?

Mr. Fletcher: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks. The Government will take his advice, not least through more privatisation.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Minister agree that, in addition to the generous price at which BT shares were offered to the public, one reason for the great success of the sale was the change in marketing and the determined effort made publicly to sell those shares? When the Government prepare their White Paper on investment protection, will they examine the old legislation and, while ensuring investor protection, try to relax the rules on advertising and on prospectuses to ensure that similar efforts can be made for other share sales?

Mr. Fletcher: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are planning to replace the existing Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958. That will be the subject of a White Paper to be published early next year. We have learnt two lessons from the British Telecom privatisation: first, that there are many hundreds of thousands of willing investors in Britain; and, secondly, the stockbroking profession has learnt that by advertising its wares on a much bigger scale than usual it can ensure that those who wish to buy shares, including small investors, can do so.

Mr. Hanley: While congratulating my hon. Friend on the success of the British Telecom issue, and on the fact that nearly 2 million people are shareholders for the first time, including more than 180,000 employees of British Telecom, may I ask whether he has considered an education programme for the new shareholders in the light of today's press reports that some

understand the nature of a contract on the Stock Exchange? Will my hon. Friend consider running a programme of education about the nature of share ownership in conjunction with the Stock Exchange?

Mr. Fletcher: I am almost tempted, in a lighthearted way, to ask my hon. Friend whether he might not have an interest in such an educational programme. The sale of shares in this way and on such a scale is an educational programme in itself for the whole country, and not least for the Opposition parties.

Mr. Williams: In view of the Minister's pleasure at the sale of BT, will he tell us whether he would be pleased with, and would re-employ, a broker who sold his shares for half price—or would he run to a solicitor to take action for incompetence and negligence?

Mr. Fletcher: With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, he has the wrong end of the stick. It is incorrect to conclude that the whole offer can be made at today's price or at the level of any increase in price since the offer was made. The current price reflects the marginal demand — that is the excess of willing buyers over willing sellers. That has always been the case in an issue such as this.

Small Businesses

10. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage greater use of official and commercially collected data in connection with the provision of statistics on the small business sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The findings of the studies that regularly appear in *British Business* are that there was a net surplus of 112,000 small businesses over the past four years and that these firms create or preserve more jobs than their share of the labour market suggests. We take every opportunity to publicise these facts.

Mr. Ashdown: I asked whether the Minister would consider greater use of the official statistics. Does he not recall that, at the small business conference in Amsterdam in October this year, he rightly said that reliable and accurate data, which he admitted we did not have, on the life and death cycle of small businesses, are to use his own words, the

"life blood of governmental policy-making"?

In the light of that brave statement, and of his agreement that the official information is inadequate and should be improved, is not his answer somewhat complacent? When will he match that rhetoric with some action?

Mr. Trippier: The stock of reliable statistics is improving all the time, and I referred to that in my substantive answer to the substantive question. I admit that there is a paucity of available statistics for employment in small firms, although that is getting better. For example, we have established that the figure for self-employment is 2·25 million, which is the highest figure on record. My difficulty, as Minister with responsibility for small firms, is that I have to balance on the one hand the paucity of statistics in that particular sector with the fact that I wish to try to reduce the form-filling burden on small firms, which they regard as a handicap.

Mr. Richard Page: Are the collected statistics used by the small firms service? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with the expertise in the breadth, and particularly the depth, of the service that is offered by the small firms service, particularly through the local enterprise agencies?

Mr. Trippier: I have said on the Floor of the House before that I am extremely proud of the expertise in the small firms service. There has been a rapid growth in the local enterprise agencies. There has to be a close relationship between the small firms service and the local enterprise agencies. I have always believed that the directors of the enterprise agencies should be generalists and that the small firms counsellors should be specialists. I am taking steps to ensure that that happens and is successful.

Power Engineering Industry

12. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department is doing to assist the power engineering industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The industry is supported by SFI assistance under the Science and Technology Act and by Industry Act grants. Many overseas projects have also benefited from Government assistance in the form of export credits and aid and trade provision.

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Minister aware that this industry, particularly in my constituency, still continues to shed jobs at a high and regrettable rate? Is he further aware that the industry is suffering because of the collapse of domestic and overseas demand? Will the Government look seriously at their role in ensuring that we have a power engineering industry in the future, which means that we shall have to bring forward, with Government assistance, plans for the refurbishment or rebuilding of power stations in the near future, and not leave it for the next decade?

Mr. Lamont: As the hon. Gentleman knows, questions about domestic power station orders are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. As regards support in export markets, we shall continue to support the industry. We have been successful. GEC, a company located in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, between 1 January 1980 and 31 December 1984 won more turbine generator orders than any other company in the world. It is the world leader. However, we recognise that the market position remains uncertain, but the company has had a lot of help, including £100 million from the aid and trade provision since 1980. There has been a lot of Government support, and we shall continue to do all that we can to help.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the few remaining effective firms in the gas turbine industry, is situated in my constituency? Is he further aware that the real costs facing such industries in developing new models to enter world markets are high? If there is to be any Government support to the turbine industry, my hon. Friend should look carefully at the support needed to develop new models to beat our overseas competitors.

Mr. Lamont: I note what my hon. Friend says. Since 1980, under the Science and Technology Act, £11 million has gone towards supporting this sort of development. We shall, of course, continue to do what we can to help.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

13. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to be in a position to publish the Silbertson report on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Channon: The report was published on 13 December.

Mr. Kirkwood: A cursory analysis of the report shows many parts where the conclusions seem to be based on speculative hypotheses rather than on firm evidence, and where the policy recommendations seem to fail to take account of the implications for some of the areas affected by the report's conclusions. Will the Minister assure the House that he will take other counsel as well as consider the recommendations in the Silbertson report before agreeing to phase out the agreement rapidly?

Mr. Channon: Most definitely. Before any decision is taken, I hope to obtain the views of the industry and all the other people who are interested in this topic.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this is a sunrise and not a sunset industry? Is he further aware that the industry is not afraid of fair free trade, but that many non-tariff barriers are imposed on British textile exports? Until those non-tariff barriers can be eliminated, some type of MFA is required.

Mr. Channon: I note my hon. Friend's views on that topic, and we shall bear them very much in mind.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister agree that the proposals in the report met with a chorus of criticism from the British textile industry and that his reply during the last Trade and Industry Question Time gave rise to considerable concern? Will give a clear assurance, without equivocation, reservations, winks or nods, that the British Government are totally committed to the renegotiation of the MFA to ensure that there is no unfair import penetration and to protect British textile jobs?

Mr. Channon: I read accounts which were critical of the report and the comments which were favourable. At the moment the Government are merely consulting. Surely we are entitled to consult and consider all the evidence before any decisions are reached.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Is my right hon. Friend not conerned that the report appears to support and enourage the export of British jobs? Should not such a policy be resisted with great vigour?

Mr. Channon: Put like that, my hon. Friend makes a very persuasive argument. I do not necessarily accept his preface, but I must repeat to the House that all views will be gratefully received. We shall consider them carefully. The Government will have to make their position clear to the House when the decisions have been arrived at.

Mr. John Smith: Is the Minister aware that much of the criticism focused on the report has pointed out that its conclusions are flawed because of the doubtful assumptions and methodology adopted by its author? Will that fact be borne in mind? Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously telling the House that the Government have not reached a conclusion about whether they want a new MFA? Is it not high time that the Government committed themselves clearly to another MFA and told the House of that commitment?

Mr. Channon: Of course we shall tell the House. The report was received only six days ago. Surely we are entitled to study the report and the evidence in favour of more liberalisation, and the evidence in favour of less liberalisation. That seems to be perfectly reasonable, and I believe that any sensible Government would wish to study all the evidence before coming to a conclusion.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although we appreciate the fact that he must study this newly published report, a word of encouragement to the textile industry, which during the past 20 years has suffered traumatically, would be much appreciated? The industry urgently needs not just one renewal of the MFA, but possibly two.

Mr. Channon: From the exchanges in the House today, I am left in no doubt about the feeling that exists on both sides on this issue. It is something which I and the Government must consider. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The textile industry has done extremely well and has good prospects for the future.

Child Pushchairs

14. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with safety standards relating to child buggy pushchairs.

Mr. Fletcher: No, I am not. That is why I propose to remake the existing safety regulations on pushchairs. The consultation process is almost complete, and I hope to lay draft new regulations before the House in the spring.

Mr. Chapman: While welcoming my hon. Friend's reply and applauding the initiative that he has taken, may I ask him to confirm that some designs of collapsible child buggies have caused serious accidents and that, by definition, they are pushchairs and therefore come within the 1978 regulations — a fact which apparently some trading standards officers do not appreciate?

Mr. Fletcher: I take my hon. Friend's point. There should be no doubt in trading standards officers' minds that pushchairs are included in the existing regulations, as they will be in the new regulations.

Insurance Market

16. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he is making together with other European Economic Community Ministers in securing a free market for insurance within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon: Finance Ministers discussed the proposed directive on freedom to provide non-life insurance last week. Negotiations are continuing on this directive, and on this and in general we shall continue to press for rapid progress towards a free Community market for insurance.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: When will the EEC give substance to its claim to be a common market? When will the European Court take effective action against those countries which continue to block our insurance industry? The British people are becoming tired of paying an expensive membership fee to a club which continues to block our trade in that way.

Mr. Channon: No one would dispute what my hon. Friend has said. There are four court cases pending. The

British Government are intervening in each of them. I am told that the oral hearings in the first two cases have been set down for next March.

Mr. Gould: The Minister has again fobbed us off with a meaningless answer on that point. Our trade with the EEC in manufactures is running at an annual deficit of £9 billion. Is it not time that he insisted that we had proper access for the British insurance industry and other providers of financial services to the Common Market? Has he not allowed the Germans and others who have been obstructive for such a long time to get away with it for far too long?

Mr. Channon: I have given the best and most truthful answer to the House. Whether the hon. Member likes it is neither here nor there. It is all very well for him to say that I must insist on certain things taking place. He knows perfectly well that there is no way of insisting in this case. Nothing will happen until those court cases are settled. He knows that just as well as I do. There is no point in pretending otherwise.

Mr. Budgen: When did the EEC first promise to secure a free market for insurance?

Mr. Channon: I cannot give my hon. Friend a definite answer, but my view is that we are entitled to freedom of insurance under the Treaty of Rome.

Mr. Heffer: Is the Minister aware that it is difficult enough to get money out of insurance companies in this country? It would be a dead loss to try to get money out of insurance companies in the EC countries.

Mr. Channon: My idea is that British companies should have more opportunities abroad, rather than the other way round.

Small Firms (Government Contracts)

17. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific steps Her Majesty's Government take to faciltate the access of small firms to Government contracts.

Mr. Trippier: For lower value contracts firms need no longer go through the Department's approval procedures before winning orders. The threshold was initially set at £2,000 two years ago and has since been raised to £10,000. Above that level, non-approved firms can tender for contracts which are not urgent, subject to being approved afterwards if they are successful. Departments have been asked to rotate invitations to tender among firms on their approved lists so that more firms get an opportunity to bid. For firms seeking approval we have standardised the financial and general information that Departments require.

Mr. Hamilton: I am sure that the House will welcome that encouraging news, but what proportion of Government procurement contracts go to small firms? Is my hon. Friend satisfied with that figure?

Mr. Trippier: Records are not kept at the moment of the details of which business goes to small firms, but we have asked the Ministry of Defence to supply information, through a survey that it is currently conducting, as to how much of its procurement business goes to firms employing fewer than 200 people. The findings of that survey will, of course, be of great interest to us.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Minister accept that such records should be kept for all industries? Does he agree that the size and power of the Government's procurement system makes it the most potent weapon available to the Government for assisting small industries? Surely it is even more powerful than the Government's much-vaunted 103 measures put together. When will he take more strenuous action to use the Government's procurement system to assist small industries more effectively?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman is being uncharitable to the Government. We have done a great deal in the past five years to improve access for small firms to Government procurement contracts. In my answer to the supplementary question of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) I referred to another initiative that we have taken. I appreciate that it is important and valuable that we adopt such an approach, and that is why we are doing something about it.

Sir Dudley Smith: Will my hon. Friend ensure—I am sure that he will—that when small firms deservedly win contracts with Government Departments the Departments settle their accounts on time? Is he aware that it is becoming a common complaint that small firms are not having their accounts settled by large firms as quickly as they should be?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is right. I take every available opportunity to try to get the message across that large firms should pay the bills of small firms on time wherever possible. I accept that there are a number of laggards. If my hon. Friend is aware of any examples of Government Departments not paying the bills of small firms on time, I shall be grateful if he will let me have the evidence, whereupon I shall investigate the matter.

Mr. Williams: If this basic information is not available, what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that it is available in future?

Mr. Trippier: It seems that the right hon. Gentleman did not hear my reply to an earlier supplementary question. I said that we were taking the initiative of asking— *[Interruption.]* That is a good example. There is much business there that is available for small firms. Having taken the initiative, it will be interesting to compare how much public procurement business goes to small firms in Britain as against that going to similar firms in the United States.

Telecommunications Equipment

18. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he is making on removing barriers to trade in telecommunications' equipment between European Economic Community member states.

Mr. Channon: The Government have strongly encouraged the development of a Community telecommunications programme aimed at expanding intra-Community trade. Two important measures recently agreed are the urgent development of harmonised standards for terminal equipment and a recommendation that operators should open up their tendering procedures to suppliers in other member states.

Mr. Coombs: I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks about terminals, but will he give the House an

assurance that the proposals that he has mentioned will be implemented and brought to fruition in 1985? Does he agree that reciprocal trading agreements for other telecommunications equipment such as PABXs, which directly affect firms in my constituency of Swindon, which wish to manufacture and market them, would be of advantage in creating inward investment and, therefore, jobs, and in providing more export opportunities throughout the European Common Market?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend makes a persuasive case in the second part of his question. As for the first part, it is the British Government's hope that that will be done in 1985. That is not entirely within our gift, but I hope very much that that will be done.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Great though the progress may be on our side in liberalising the purchasing arrangements in Government telecommunication contracts, is the Minister aware that in the EEC as a whole there may not be anything like a similar desire and determination to do likewise? Will he note that the French Government have clearly taken no steps to liberalise and open their ordering and tendering system? Will he undertake to the House to obtain matching agreements so that there are clear commitments from our European partners, especially the French?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about reciprocity. He has said that the British Government's attitude is not always the same as that of other member states. I shall be grateful if he will have a word with those sitting beside him, so that he can understand some of the problems.

Mr. Conway: Where telecommunication developments require certification by the division within my right hon. Friend's Department, especially if they are inventions of small firms in non-assisted areas such as my constituency of Shrewsbury, will my right hon. Friend assure me that the applications will be processed with the greatest possible speed?

Mr. Channon: I had better look carefully at what my hon. Friend has said. I shall consider it and reply to him sympathetically and quickly.

Manufactured Goods

19. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to seek to ensure that in 1985 the United Kingdom exports more manufactured goods than it imports.

Mr. Channon: There is no means, short of direct controls incompatible with our interests as a trading nation, of doing what the hon. Member wants.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that this country's wealth has always depended on the manufacturing industries and that it is essential that we get back into a surplus of trade in those industries as soon as possible? Does he further accept that many Opposition Members and people in the country at large are very concerned at the Government's apparent disregard of the fact that we have been trading in deficit on manufactured goods?

Mr. Channon: What is far more important than a surplus or deficit in any one part of our trading account is whether we are making any progress in trying to increase the productivity of the British manufacturing industry and, indeed, other industries. We are making considerable strides, in that our productivity has been increasing in the past three years at more than twice the rate achieved by either France or Germany. That is a creditable achievement.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party's obsession with mercantalist economics is typical of its attitude to economic policy in general, and that what is required is recognition of the fact that the contribution to be made by the export of services to our economic future is as important, if not more so, that of manufacturing?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the voodoo economics practised by Opposition Members, but what we should like to see, of course, is a good performance — *[Interruption.]* It is the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) today——

Mr. Skinner: And the hon. Gentleman yesterday.

Mr. Channon: What he said yesterday, the hon. Gentleman says today.

It is very important to the British economy that we should try to make all our industry competitive, and we should try to do as well as we can with all sectors of our industry. Both manufacturing and services are important.

Mr. Crowther: Does the Minister accept that the rate of productivity in many British manufacturing industries is now very high and that the real problem about competitiveness is in areas that are within the scope of the Government's own policies; for example, energy prices and the alarmingly imbalanced exchange rates between sterling and European currencies?

Mr. Channon: In fact, at the present rate of sterling in many parts of the world, British goods are more competitive than ever before, rather than less competitive. This is because so many currencies are linked to the dollar. It is perfectly true that other factors affect competitiveness, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be fair enough to recognise the steps that we have taken to try to help businesses, via taxation reforms, the abolition of the national insurance surcharge and the control of public spending—which I emphasise. There are major efforts to help British industry.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, important as our manufacturing base is—as long as it suits its product to what the market actually wants—our service industries in the export market do not have the import element within them that most of our manufacturing industries do, and that makes them even more important in terms of balance of payments to this country?

Mr. Channon: As my hon. Friend says, it is absolutely right that our service industries are providing more substantial amounts for our balance of payments and our export effort. I am sure that that trend will continue over the next few years.

Mr. Gould: Is not the acid test of our international competitiveness how well we actually perform in international markets? Is the Minister completely unaware of the fact that the deficit in our trade and manufactured goods which appeared for the first time last year threatens

already this year to more than double? Is that not so alarming a trend as to dent even the Minister's complacency?

Mr. Channon: We have had this discussion before. So far, I have been unable to convince the hon. Gentleman that, although there has been a considerable surplus in the past few years, it is impossible at all stages to have a surplus in oil, manufactured goods and everything else —

Mr. Gould: Rubbish.

Mr. Channon: It is not rubbish. If we did that, we would have to export even more capital. When the hon. Gentleman is not whingeing about one thing, he is whingeing about the other.

Mr. Batiste: Will my hon. Friend confirm that during 1985 the Government will have to make a decision about participation by Britain in the American manned space station programme? Is he aware that that participation is vital to our manufacturing industry over a wide range of high technology products? When will he be in a position to make a statement about participation in that very important programme?

Mr. Channon: I hope that we shall be in a position to make a statement early next year.

Nationalised Industries (Accounting Practices)

20. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the accounting practices within the nationalised industries for which he is responsible.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes, I am satisfied with the accounting practices employed by those industries within my Department's responsibility in preparing statutory accounts.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister ever intervened to direct British Shipbuilders as to the way in which it prepares its accounts?

Mr. Lamont: I have never issued a directive to British Shipbuilders about the preparation of its accounts, although a couple of years ago we had discussions about the presentation of results as between different divisions.

Mr. Speaker: Question No. 21.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order at the end of Question Time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: A number of hon. Members wished to ask supplementary questions on my question No. 20.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members—well over 40 of them — wish to ask the remaining questions on the Order Paper.

Manufactured Goods

21. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the first 10 months of this year there was a deficit of £3·7 billion.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister confirm that the Government's trading record is the worst in British trading history and is yet further proof of the abysmal failure of the Government's economic strategy? Is he not ashamed to be a member of such an inefficient, uncompetitive Government? Is it not time that the Department of Trade and Industry team resigned en masse so that Britian can regain leadership in world markets?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman will have already heard the exchange of questions on this at Question Time. We have had a surplus on current account in each of the past four years. We would have had a surplus this year but for the miners' strike, and we expect a surplus on current account next year. That is a pretty good record.

Soviet Union

23. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trade with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Channon: In the first 10 months of 1984 the level of trade between our two countries increased by 32 per cent. I consider that the prospects for trade with the Soviet Union are better now than they have been for a number of years, and I hope that this trend will be maintained.

Mr. Terlezki: As Mr. Gorbachev is visiting our free, democratic country this week, can my hon. Friend say whether he has already met or is about to meet Mr. Gorbachev so as to ensure that Anglo-Soviet trade can be increased in some areas, with the exception of certain scientific, technical and industrial equipment which it could be against our future interests to sell?

Mr. Channon: I have met Mr. Gorbachev once this week. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and I, among others, are giving him dinner tomorrow. One of the main topics so far has been Anglo-Soviet trading relations and I hope that we shall be able to make important progress in that regard.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to ask a question?

Mr. Heffer: Yes, Mr. Speaker, but it is difficult due to the rabble beside me.

Is the Minister aware that, although many of us have severe criticisms of the Soviet internal regime and believe that there must be greater democracy and human rights there, we nevertheless believe that it is vital for the interests of this country that trade with the Soviet Union should increase? Will the Minister give a guarantee that in tomorrow's discussions with the Soviet representatives every avenue will be explored to see what can be done to improve trading relations with the Soviet Union?

Mr. Channon: Yes, Sir.

Share Ownership

24. **Mr. Hayward** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to provide encouragement for greater employee participation through share ownership schemes in the enterprises under his control.

Mr. Fletcher: As I have already told the House today, we have just completed the biggest single step so far this

century towards wider ownership of shares in British industry. Over 2 million people purchased British Telecom shares, including many first-time investors and 184,000 employees of BT. We shall continue to encourage wider ownership of shares both by employees and by individual investors.

Mr. Hayward: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but may I ask him whether he has any expectation that, in the near future, share ownership in this country will rise to the levels that currently exist in France and West Germany?

Mr. Fletcher: We would be extremely pleased to see that happen. We are taking other steps, too. Privatisation is very important, but changes are also taking place in the Stock Exchange and in the financial services sector in general which will encourage wider share ownership.

Mr. Williams: Does the Minister recollect, in relation to BT, that there were warnings that those who made multiple applications could face actions for fraud? Can he tell us that his Department intends to initiate such legal action, bearing in mind the Prime Minister's injunction that the law must be obeyed? Or is it only working men and women who have to obey the law, and not the Government's friends in the City?

Mr. Fletcher: There is no justification for that remark. My Department is investigating very carefully the cases that have been brought to our attention.

RAF Basic Trainer

3.32 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the ministerial decision not to select the Hunting Firecracker as a basic trainer."

In an answer yesterday to a written question about the replacement of the RAF basic trainer, the Minister for Defence Procurement rejects the all-British Hunting Firecracker and short-lists a Brazilian and a Swiss aircraft as the contenders for the contract. That decision has astounded many hon. Members and many in the country who cannot understand why a British-designed and British-built aircraft, the Firecracker, which fully meets all the design specifications of the RAF, should be rejected in favour of foreign contenders built by countries that are not even members of NATO.

There has been a mine of misinformation about the contenders. In the written answer, the Minister said that the foreign aircraft had advantages in cost and performance. Clearly, he has not properly evaluated the costs. The Brazilian aircraft is heavily subsidised by that Government, which in turn has been propped up by the western Governments. We would therefore pay twice over for that aircraft. Each of the Swiss planes—the Pilatus —will cost up to £300,000 more because, unfairly, it has been built greatly to exceed the RAF specifications. In other words, one pays one's money and takes one's choice. If the RAF were going to change the rules in mid-air, the other contenders should have been told. One does not learn to drive in a racing car, which is what the Swiss Pilatus is; one learns in a British Maestro.

The Hunting Firecracker is British-designed and British-built. It is entirely financed by British entrepreneurial enterprise—by people who are prepared to risk their own money.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is applying for leave to move the Adjournment of the House. He should not be making detailed arguments.

Mr. Ashby: I take your point, Mr. Speaker. This is an application under Standing order No. 10. I shall attempt not to put the argument but to present the facts.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The relevant words are "urgent", "specific" and "important".

Mr. Ashby: The aircraft was to be built in an area of mining decline where pits are closing, which faces 20 to 30 per cent. unemployment and where jobs are really needed. The enthusiasm and the great hopes of the people involved in the company and the area have been dashed. The contract is to go to a foreign aircraft manufactured under licence either by the great nationalised giant of Shorts or the great denationalised giant of British Aerospace. Whichever one it is, the British taxpayer pays for it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but he must not go into the detailed arguments that he might advance if the House gave him permission to move the Adjournment of the House to discuss the matter. He must make out his case for its urgent consideration.

Mr. Ashby: This is of course an urgent matter because of the answer that has been given and because of the decisions that must be taken. In terms of cost, the Hunting Firecracker — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] — this matter relates directly to the written answer. Hunting Firecracker offered to come back with reduced costs but was told that that was not necessary. The Swiss and Brazilians are unfairly being given the opportunity to re-tender. In terms of performance, it was acknowledged by the RAF that the Hunting Firecracker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must stop the hon. Gentleman. He must not go into the details of the matter. He is well outside the rules. Will he now come to a conclusion?

Mr. Ashby: In terms of cost and in terms of performance, Hunting Firecracker is being treated unfairly. That is why it is essential that we debate the issue. There has been a debate in another place and it is right that the matter be debated here as well. That is essential to the future of the British aircraft industry.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the ministerial decision not to select the Hunting Firecracker as a basic trainer."

I have listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman has said——

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I regret that I do not consider that the matter which the hon. Gentleman has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10, and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Teachers (Independent Pay Review) (Scotland)

3.36 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish an independent pay review body with powers to fix the annual rates of pay for teachers, their conditions of service and related matters in Scotland.

The Houghton committee of inquiry reported its findings on the pay of non-university teachers to the Secretary of State for Scotland in December 1974. The committee recommended salary increases of 30·5 per cent. for Scottish day school teachers with effect from May 1974. *[Interruption.]* The committee concluded that further independent examination of teachers' pay would be necessary. *[Interruption.]* I should like to quote from paragraph 274 of the Houghton committee report.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) is saying, because Tory Members, who have no interest in Scottish education, are talking so loudly.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the whole House wishes to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful for your protection, Mr. Speaker. The Houghton committee said:

"However good the information, and whatever the improvements in negotiating machinery, there are bound to be occasions when a further independent examination of teachers' pay is needed. We recommend that there should be periodic reviews on the lines of this Inquiry perhaps every seven years. Such inquiries would have as their task the total re-examination of the levels of pay and salary structures in the teaching profession, assessing not only the validity of current internal differentials but also adjustments to salary levels in the light of social and educational circumstances at the time."

Lord Houghton later opined that seven years was inappropriate and that there should be quinquennial reviews. From July 1974 to July 1979, the index of retail prices increased by 109 per cent., whereas the salaries of Scottish teachers rose by only 72 per cent. Inevitably, in July 1979 the salaries of Scottish teachers were remitted to the Standing Commission on Pay Comparability—the Clegg commission. That commission reported in March 1980 and awarded increases totalling 18·2 per cent. in two phases, the first from 1 January 1980 and the second from 1 September 1980.

Since September 1980, the erosion that followed Houghton has inexorably followed Clegg. The index of retail prices at September 1980 stood at 270·2 and at September 1984 at 355·5—an increase of 31·6 per cent. Teachers' salaries have increased by only 23·2 per cent. over the same period, a drop of 8·4 per cent., or about £821 in an average teacher's salary. Teachers' pay has fared worse in relation to average earnings. While those in work increased their earnings by about 39 per cent. between August 1980 and August 1984, teachers' pay rose by 23·2 per cent. — a differential of 16·2 per cent., which is the equivalent of £1,584 in average teachers' salaries.

Obviously, a teacher has no more right than anyone else to an immutable salary relativity, but movement up or down must be related to changes in the nature of the job —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to give the hon. Gentleman consideration; it is difficult to hear him at this end of the Chamber.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Scottish joint negotiating committee has just produced a report which confirms that, within the last five years, the workload of Scottish teachers has increased substantially. That report was compiled by a joint teacher-management working party, and was accepted unanimously by the full Scottish joint negotiating committee, which includes representatives of the Secretary of State for Scotland. That report covers changes in the curriculum, the nature of teaching, discipline and administration. In particular it focuses attention on increased teacher workload in and out of school and on the greater stress and pressure so prevalent in our classrooms today.

That report concluded that, unless pay, conditions, staffing and resources are improved, the morale of teachers will continue to decline and the education service will deteriorate. In that atmosphere, educational development will surely perish.

The current salaries negotiating machinery is incapable of producing fair results, as the arbitration report in 1982 pointed out. That report admitted that teachers were due an increase of about 11 per cent., but notwithstanding that, the arbiters accepted the "ability to pay" argument and awarded only 6 per cent. rather than the 11 per cent. they considered due. In so doing, they proved that neither negotiation nor arbitration can provide for teachers a means of securing a fair evaluation of their skills and efforts.

It is nevertheless necessary that salary negotiations continue, because only the management and the teachers' sides are sensitive to the changing needs of the service. The negotiating machinery cannot withstand the pressure of financial restraint imposed annually by Government for reasons unconnected with the value of teachers' work. Teachers cannot be regarded as a rearguard as inflation rises and as a vanguard—setting the good example—as inflation falls. An independent review body established every five years would guarantee a limit to the extent to which teachers could fall behind other similarly qualified professions and would give an opportunity for fair adjustment. That is all that teachers ask. How much more effective teachers would be if they could channel all their energies into the classroom and leave the streets to others and other causes!

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Mr. Roy Jenkins, Mr. Russell Johnston, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. John Maxton, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. David Steel, Mr. Gordon Wilson and Mr. James Wallace.

TEACHERS (INDEPENDENT PAY REVIEW) (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Archy Kirkwood accordingly presented a Bill to establish an independent pay review body with powers to fix the annual rates of pay for teachers, their conditions of service and related matters in Scotland: And the same was read the First time ; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 January and to be printed. [Bill 50.]

Local Authority Capital Expenditure

3.44 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move, That this House do now adjourn.

Leave having been given on Tuesday 18 December under Standing Order No. 10 to discuss:

The statements made on 18 December relating to local authorities' capital expenditure in England and Wales.

There are a number of very important reasons why this debate should take place today: its importance to millions of people; its importance in respect of local democracy; its importance to the building and construction industry and, not least, to those who work in it. The debate will give the House of Commons the opportunity to vote upon yesterday's statements about local government capital investment and to record its views on the Government's abysmal management of these matters, which affect millions of people in this country.

The Government's record is one of broken promises, of regular changes of mind, of misleading statements and of prevarication and delay which add up to incompetence in the management by the Government of this crucial area of local government activity. The Tory policies of stop-go of the 1950s and early 1960s pale into insignificance when seen beside this Government's performance since 1979. As a result of that performance, this country is now rapidly sliding back to an era of private affluence for some and public squalor for many. A real crisis exists now in housing and the situation is deteriorating rapidly. The crisis affects people who own their own homes, tenants of private landlords and council house tenants, too.

Many recent studies, including those by the Policy Studies Institute and the National Economic Development Office, have shown the continuing and rising need for more public investment in housing. The present backlog exists both in the public and private sector, both of which depend upon support through the national housing investment programme. There are over 1 million households on waiting lists for council accommodation, of which over 200,000 households are overcrowded; almost 250,000 households share accommodation; 190,000 people await sheltered accommodation; 7,000 families await specialised disabled accommodation.

According to the English house condition survey, over 1 million dwellings are unfit for human habitation; almost 400,000 lack basic amenities; over 500,000 require repairs costing more than £7,000 per dwelling; and 2·5 million require repairs costing in excess of £2,000. A particular worry—it should be a worry to the whole House—is the increasing level of homelessness and the escalating cost to the taxpayer of board and lodging accommodation payments and the increasing use of hostels and hotels to accommodate homeless families. Over 80,000 households will be accepted as homeless this year. Many more are refused help.

Defective housing is also widespread in the public sector and the level of slum clearance is at an all-time low. Government policy means that the current year will see the lowest number of council house completions ever recorded. As I said yesterday, the best year of the Government's record produced 214,000 starts in the public and private sectors. In the lowest year of achievement of the previous Labour Government, that total was 264,000 starts—50,000 more.

In a letter to the Prime Minister on 2 November this year, the president of the Building Employers Federation condemned reports of the possibility of capital spending on housing being cut by £600 million in the coming financial year. That is, in effect, what has happened. He claimed that such a reduction was equivalent to 18 per cent. of the total housing programme and to the loss of at least 75,000 jobs in building and construction. He went on:

"A further cut in housing capital would do untold damage to the industry and would be seen as one more blow in a sustained campaign to undermine the confidence of the British construction industry."

The National Home Improvement Council said:

"It is incredible to think that, while housing is steadily rotting away, local authorities have ready money . . . but are not allowed to use it for putting housing in order. It is unbelievable that this state of affairs is allowed to exist, especially when money spent on improving our houses not only maintains our standard of living, but also creates jobs as no other industry can."

Those views are shared by the Federation of Master Builders—the paymasters of the Conservative party—the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, the British construction materials industry, the Confederation of Building Material Producers, the CBI and the TUC. Indeed, they are shared by everyone associated with the management, building and construction of housing and with the building and construction industry.

The Secretary of State for the Environment tried to argue yesterday that nothing had changed. That can only be described as an attempt to mislead the House. In the current year, £3,244 million was allocated to local authorities, new towns and the Housing Corporation. The revised projection for next year is a reduction of £188 million. However, in a statement to the press a few weeks ago, the Department of the Environment and the Secretary of State tried to present that as a reduction of only £65 million compared with the original projection.

The year-on-year cut of £188 million excluded any allowance for inflation. If that is taken into account—and taking the Government's figure of 5 per cent. inflation—the real terms reduction is as much as £350 million, or 11 per cent.

Furthermore, while capital receipts were expected to rise by £430 million gross, £310 million net, that was to be clawed back by a reduction in the Treasury contribution from £1,644 million in the current financial year to £1,326 million next year. Therefore, taking the two differences together, the total cut in the money available to local authorities is well over £600 million—a cut in real terms of about 20 per cent. That is what the Secretary of State was telling the House yesterday and that is why he should not have been surprised at the reception that he was given from both sides.

The Government have tried to work a con trick in saying that gross housing provision is being maintained. That is simply not the case.

Indeed, £1,600 million of housing investment programme allocation and 20 per cent. of local receipts mean a housing cash limit of £324 million, compared with more than £1 billion in the current financial year. Looked at that way, the cut is in excess of £700 million in the money that the Treasury is putting into the housing programme. We are told that this is being done to maintain the cash limit for 1985-86. but I suspect, as do many in housing, that that cash limit is already as good as broken by resources committed for the coming financial year. To

[Dr. John Cunningham]

suggest that it will somehow be maintained is ridiculous. If the limit were enforced in that way, the Government would have to declare, in effect, a total and obligatory moratorium now. I challenge the Government to say whether that is the reality.

The Cambridge Econometrics study that is used by most organisations, including many in the building industry and the private sector, equates £500 million of expenditure with 65,000 jobs in the construction industry and the economy as a whole. If cuts in excess of £1 billion are put into effect, the loss of jobs is likely to exceed 100,000.

The Government have got all this wrong. Their main argument is that the action is necessary to prevent overspending. But no local authority can overspend because, by definition, an authority must balance its budget. In so far as overspend exists at all in the Treasury's mind—the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) has used the phrase "voodoo economics"—it is simply an attempt to match the real world of local authority services and provision, and the needs of people and our infrastructure, with the increasingly unreal world of Treasury economics and accounting.

Will the Secretary of State tell us what the real economic effect would be of letting local authorities spend their capital receipts—their own money? What does he think the sound macro-economic arguments are against that proposal? We have yet to hear from the Secretary of State or from the Chancellor of the Exchequer any convincing arguments on the ground of macro-economic policy as to why the capital expenditure of local authorities, financed wholly from their own capital receipts and assets, should be controlled in the Government's increasingly draconian, arbitrary and unfair fashion.

Even the *Financial Times* is wholly unpersuaded of the sense of the Government's case. It described yesterday's announcement as

"a particularly mean-spirited application of the Government's heads-we-win, tails-you-lose approach to local authoritities".

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): Would the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to share with the House his view on the following point? He has acknowledged, and none of us perhaps would dispute, that an enormous number of people want rented accommodation. Will he therefore take this opportunity to declare from thae Dispatch Box tht if his party was re-elected to office, it would repeal the shorthold provisions of the Housing Act 1980 which provide private rented accommodation for those in need?

Dr. Cunningham: I regret giving way to the hon. Gentleman. He abused the intervention. It was not even relevant to what I am discussing. I am in the middle of advancing an argument about expenditure of capital receipts to the Secretary of State.

Of course, the Government will argue that they are cash-limiting capital expenditure by local authorities and in doing so they will act to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement, since, if, local authorities cannot invest their capital receipts, they lend them to the markets or the banks, or use them to repay existing debt. In that way the size of the net total of public sector borrowing is reduced.

There is the gravest suspicion that the Treasury is using capital receipts as a back-door method of massaging down the PSBR figure and of indirectly financing Government debt. But only practitioners of voodoo economics—to use the colourful and accurate phrase of the hon. Member for Selly Oak—would regard that as either justifiable or sensible. It is nonsense, economically and socially, to withhold those capital receipts from use in local government where they could be put to effective use in the regeneration of the British economy, housing people and creating jobs and employment in our economy.

We are entitled to ask, and the House is entitled to know, what has changed since 3 November 1982 when, during the debate on the Loyal Address, the Prime Minister said:

"We need more capital spending by local government and in the public sector generally. I agree that it is vital to maintain the nation's infrastructure, its roads, its buildings, its water supply and its drains."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1982; Vol. 31, c. 21.]

If that was right in November 1982, why has it suddenly become wrong in December 1984? If it was right in 1981 for the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), then a Treasury Minister, to argue that there should be no control over local authorities' expenditure of their own capital receipts, why is it right now for him as Chancellor to argue that there should be increasing turning of the screw, leading, presumably, to total control of local authorities' use of their capital receipts?

What has changed in the economy since the right hon. Gentleman changed his position as a Minister? There has not been any improvement, certainly not in housing and certainly not in the building and construction industry. What has changed is simply that an election has come and gone and that the commitments given at that time have been abandoned, just as the commitment to owner-occupiers for grants to improve their premises has been abandoned. Apparently, following yesterday's statement of the Secretary of State for the Environment, there is no longer any commitment either to young people who cannot afford to buy a house to be housed by the local councils. That commitment, too, has been ditched by the Government.

Since the Secretary of State said that people should look to the private market, can he explain the press notice from his Department today, which points out that not only is building falling in the public sector under his policies but that it is falling in the private sector as well? How do the Government expect young unemployed people to buy a house? How do they expect young people in the black and ethnic communities, trapped in appalling conditions and also unemployed, to buy houses? How can elderly and disabled people, living in often crumbling, inadequate, damp and cold accommodation, buy their way out of such situations?

What are the economics behind the Secretary of State's statement yesterday? For that matter, what social policy lies behind it? Do not the Government realise that everyday existence for millions of people in appalling and inadequate housing is abysmal? Do they not recognise the long-term damage to people's health of bad housing conditions? Do they not realise that every child living in overcrowded accommodation, short of space, peace and

quiet, and the ability properly to communicate with his or her parents, is a child who will probably be damaged for life? Is there no feeling among Ministers about all that?

How incredibly stupid to argue that allowing the housing stock, the urban environment, the infrastructure and educational facilities in Britain to deteriorate is sound economics. Do not the Government recognise the effects of all that on the British people? The answer can only be no.

In pursuance of a perverse and failed economic policy, this crass and stupid Administration are imposing appalling sacrifices on the people of Britain through their housing policies. Frankly, it is not enough for Conservative Back Benchers to shoot the messenger as they did yesterday. This is the time to force a change, if they really want one. If Conservative Members believe what they said yesterday, if they are concerned about local democracy, employment, the building and construction industry and the infrastructure of Britain—if, above all, they are concerned about people—they will join us in the lobbies tonight.

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): To listen to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) one would think that somehow history had begun in 1979. He chided the Government with falling expenditure on new housing starts. He seems to have forgotten that when the Labour party was in government there was a cut in capital expenditure on housing of 45 per cent. That has to be compared with a figure of half that size under this Government.

If the argument today is about the treatment of capital receipts, my hon. Friends might well bear in mind that if the Labour party had been in office, with its well known opposition to the sale of council houses, there would have been no capital reciepts. Therefore, the only way that that party would have been able to sustain a capital investment programme in housing would have been to have either higher borrowing or higher taxation.

For the hon. Gentleman to chide the Government on the subject of home improvement grants is beyond belief. As he will know, in the peak year—it was a short-term major boost to home improvements—the Government spent no less than £900 million. That is 10 times the amount spent by the Labour Government when they left office.

The debate today goes to the heart of the Government's economic strategy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that the Labour party recognises that. The public expenditure plans for next year were announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his autumn statement on 12 November. That statement was approved by the House on 6 December. I shall remind the House of the terms of the motion. It stated that the House

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on keeping the public expenditure planning total for 1985-86 within the figure published in the 1984 Public Expenditure White Paper."
—[*Official Report*,6 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 519.]

The motion was approved by a majority of 145. We have not cut the total of public expenditure for 1985-86. We stuck to the figure of £132 billion for 1985-86 that we announced a year earlier. We have kept on course. Now we have to deliver that figure, which brings me to the decisions that I announced yesterday.

I repeat that our plans for local authority capital spending remain exactly as provided in the autumn statement and as approved by the House.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Local authorities have in their possession capital receipts. They can spend them on housing or whatever, without borrowing more money and without raising extra taxation. For the life of me, I cannot see the economic objection to that. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what the objection is?

Mr. Jenkin: I assure my hon. Friend that I am aware of that argument. I shall deal with it in some detail.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle) *rose*—

Mr. Jenkin: I make no complaint about the fact that the House was extremely rough with me yesterday, but I hope that hon. Members will listen to my argument today. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to give the Secretary of State a fair hearing.

Mr. Jenkin: The truth is that during the past two years local authorities in England and Wales have been spending collectively well above the Government's cash limits for each year. In 1983-84 the overspend in England was £368 million. For the present year it could be more than £500 million, even after our request for restraint.

Councils are able to exceed the national cash limit because they are free to spend part of the receipts from the sale of council houses and other assets on top of their allocations. Because of the undoubted success of the right-to-buy policy, the total amount of unspent capital receipts has now grown so large—it is £5 billion or more—that if councils were to spend as much of that as they are allowed to spend under the present rules, there would be another large national overspend in 1985-86. It could amount to £1 billion or more. That would be a direct claim on the contingency reserve. [*Laughter.*] It would add to the public sector borrowing requirement and obviously it would affect interest rates. [*Interruption.*] I shall answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) in a minute. The House wants to hear the argument. That is why I stress that the issue goes to the heart of the Government's economic strategy. I emphasise that we are not merely talking of tens or twenties of millions of pounds but of £1 billion or more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham asked quite properly why that affects the public sector borrowing requirement. When a council sells a house, for example, for £10,000, that money, if it is not spent in the year in which it is received, will be used to reduce the council's borrowing or it will be lent. In either case it reduces the council's net borrowing. That reduction in borrowing reduces the total PSBR in the year in which that £10,000 is received. Those reductions have already been taken into account each year in the public expenditure White Paper figures.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I shall finish my point before I give way. If, in a later year, the council decides to spend that £10,000, it will have to borrow back the money to finance the expenditure. *[Laughter.]* It will.

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey) *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Dr. Cunningham.

Dr. Cunningham: If all this kindergarten economics is true now, why was it not true in 1981 when the right hon. Gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer was Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and the Government were making the PSBR and the money supply the biggest test of economic and political virility? If it was not true then, what has changed?

Mr. Jenkin: It was true then.

Dr. Cunningham: It was not.

Mr. Jenkin: Yes, it was. Of course it was. The hon. Gentleman has made exactly my point. When the receipts were taken in and not spent, they went to reduce the claim on the PSBR. *[Interruption.]* Of course they did.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman has a strange memory. In 1981 there were no central Government-imposed controls on the expenditure of receipts by local councils.

Mr. Jenkin: I shall explain in a moment — *[Interruption.]*? The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 has always contained such a power. I shall come to that. The hon. Gentleman perfectly fairly asked why the figure was not taken into account. The answer is that it was. The figures go into the public expenditure total, net after receipt. Therefore, in the year in which the receipt was taken and not spent, it was taken into account. Therefore, if it is not treated as an addition to public sector borrowing when it is spent, it is being accounted for twice.

Mr. Tapsell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the leading article in today's *Financial Times*, that newspaper considers his argument in some detail and concludes that it is a purely statistical consideration with no relevance in the real world?

Mr. Jenkin: The writer of that leading article, which I have read, is not responsible for making the figures add up at the end of the day. *[Laughter.]* That is the responsibility that falls on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. A large number of hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. It is the Secretary of State's decision whether or not he will give way.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: However much Labour Members shout, the simple truth remains that if a receipt is taken in and not spent, it either reduces borrowing or is lent, and that reduces the PSBR. If, subsequently, it comes back from borrowing and is spent, that increases the PSBR. There is no denying that logic. Capital spending by local authorities——

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Jenkin: I shall not give way. Mr. Speaker, you have reminded the House that this is a short debate and that many hon. Members wish to speak. I do not wish to take too much time.

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): If my right hon. Friend could leave this curious academic and statistical debate for a moment—some of us wish to help him and do not wish to vote with the Opposition—could he at least, in the real world, give some assurances to local authorities that are in great difficulty that he will abandon from time to time those irrational arguments and give authorities some latitude in capital expenditure? That would help us a little.

Mr. Jenkin: I must say, with the greatest respect to my right hon. and learned Friend, that they are not academic arguments. They are real arguments that affect the management of the economy.

The 1980 Act always recognised, for this reason, that there had to be some regulation of the pace at which local authorities spend their accumulated receipts. The Act gave an order-making power to regulate the pace, and that is one purpose of the system of prescribed proportions. In previous years, we have used the power by order to slow the rate at which receipts could be spent by reducing the prescribed proportion. It is because of overspending during the past two years, and because of the threat of a big overspend next year, that we must reduce the proportion again. It will give us a much better chance to keep total spending within the cash limit without having to resort to disruptive and unfair measures later in the year.

To come to the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon), that must be set alongside the increased end-year flexibility that I announced yesterday and that I am sure is welcomed by local authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend will also have noted that we have made provision for an extra £100 million to give a little extra allocation to those authorities which loyally complied with my request last year.

May I stress another point on which there has been much misunderstanding. The receipts are and will remain the property of local authorities. They can spend them in future years, but the Government must ensure that the pace at which they are spent is compatible with the Government's spending plans, which the House approved on 6 December. It is essential to stick to planned expenditure and to the economic strategy. We need financial discipline to maintain the economic growth that we are achieving.

I should quote something to the House:

"An essential element of the Government's strategy will be a continuing and substantial reduction over the next few years in the share of resources required for the public sector. It is also essential to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement in order to create monetary conditions which will encourage investment and support sustained growth and the control of inflation."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It sounds like the Chancellor.

Mr. Jenkin: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it was not my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, nor was it me, although I agree with it. It was from a letter——

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, every time the Secretary of State for the Environment falters, to give him a kick?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, and this simply takes up time.

Mr. Jenkin: Opposition Members will probably recognise those words from a letter written by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, eight years ago this month,

when he had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund. He knew that those measures were right, the Cabinet of which he was a member knew that those measures were right, and the hon. Member for Copeland, who was a member of that Government, knew that the measures were right. The trouble with the Labour party is that it could not stick to its guns. The difference with this Government is that not only do we know that the policies are right, we stick to them.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Jenkin *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Jenkin: I have given way many times already.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) must realise that the Secretary of State is not giving way. He knows the rules perfectly well.

Mr. Jenkin *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise me whether it is the tradition of the House that when an hon. Member mentions another hon. Member and specifically challenges him, and the latter wishes to intervene, the Minister or the hon. Member who said that should give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows the conventions. I thought that the Secretary of State was referring to another right hon. Member — [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] If, nevertheless, the Secretary of State does not give way, that is entirely a matter for him.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Member for Copeland asked me several questions about housing, and he made some mistakes. I should make it clear that our priority in housing —there has never been a secret about this—is to enable more people to achieve what they really wish, and that is to own their homes. Since May 1979, more than 600,000 local authority homes in England have been sold to their tenants; 650,000 new houses have been built by private builders. Owner-occupation in England is now more than 63 per cent. and rising. Last year, 167,000 private sector houses were started, which is more than in any year of the Labour Government. Of course—the hon. Gentleman got this wrong—the Government agree that the public sector must continue to provide housing for those who cannot afford to buy or who have special needs.

Dr. Cunningham: That is not what the Minister said yesterday.

Mr. Jenkin: I say that today, and although the hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood me yesterday, that is now on the record.

The public sector housing programme for 1985-86 will be no less than £3,055 million. We need a better directed use of those public sector resources. The more radical authorities are joining in partnerships with the private sector to harness its resources to the task of improving housing conditions. Massive increases in the municipal solution are not the answer.

Yet the Government are still investing large sums. Total local authority capital spending in England next year will be more than £4 billion. Total United Kingdom public sector construction expenditure will be more than £10 billion. Total public sector capital expenditure will be more than £20 billion. The Labour party never takes into account private investment, which is at a record level. Total capital investment in the economy, public and private, is at its highest—about £55 billion—and in 1985 we expect the total to be even higher, at a new record of nearly £60 billion.

It is because the Government have stuck to their economic strategy that we are now getting this capital investment. If it is to be sustained in construction and elsewhere, we must continue to control public spending and borrowing so as to keep down interest rates and beat inflation. That is why the Government's policy deserves support.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call Back Benchers, I say again to the House that there is a very long list of right hon. and hon. Gentlemen wishing to take part in the debate. I appeal for brief contributions.

4.30 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): The Government have succeeded in embroiling themselves deeply with local government, first on the side of revenue and now in the matter of the total of capital expenditure. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who moved the Adjournment, said that the Government had done this in pursuit of their economic policy and that view, rather to my surprise, appeared to be shared by the Secretary of State. In fact, the bitter irony—very bitter not only for many Conservative right hon. and hon. Members—is that they have got where they have got by defiance of both the logic and the spirit of what is the core of their economic policy—the economic policy which they espoused when they came into office in 1979 and which, with this major inconsistency, they have followed since then.

I venture, as one who was into monetarism before the Chancellor of the Exchequer was into long trousers, upon a definition, not in its abusive sense but in its proper sense, of the term "monetarism". It is the proposition that inflation as we have known and suffered from it in the last generation is the consequence of the monetarisation of debt by Government. All parts of that definition are necessary to its truth; for it is only Government that can turn their borrowing into ready spending cash. No one else can do it—no private corporation, no individual, not the most powerful city such as Manchester with its statutory borrowing power or the smallest district council, can monetarise its debts. Only Government can do this.

The logic of the Government's policy, therefore, rests upon control not of the totality of public spending, whether it be central Government or other spending, but the control of the spending, and consequently of the borrowing, of central Government. That is the proposition from which the Government have departed to embroil themselves with

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the very institution of local government. If the Government had said to the local authorities, "Thus much and no more shall we pay to you by way of rate support grant; but if you decide, being elected persons and elected bodies, to spend more, then you must take the consequences of the rate that you must raise," their logic would not have been challengeable.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It has not been challenged.

Mr. Powell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

However, there could have been argument about the element of Government expenditure that was involved.

Now the Government come to the local authorities and say that they propose to limit the amount that authorities can borrow. They do not say that they propose to limit the amount that is lent on to local authorities, having been borrowed on Government security. If they said that, they would have an important case, and a case that would deserve support from the Conservative party and the Government. If they had told local authorities, "Thus much and no more shall be lent on to you from the national loans fund, having been borrowed on Government credit; but if you care, on your credit, on the credit of your rates, to go into the market and borrow more—no doubt it may be at a higher rate of interest, and no doubt that will be reflected in the rate—that is your responsibility and that is a power that you have," the theory on which the Government were acting could not have been challenged. A Government who have announced their intention of denationalising the trustee savings movement are in no position to laugh at the notion that arrangements can be made to enable local authorities to borrow otherwise than from the national loans fund.

It is by departing from the central thesis of their economic policy that the Government have not merely embroiled themselves with local government from one end of the country to the other but set themselves at issue with the underlying democratic principle of local government —that is, that as councils raise a revenue upon their responsibility to their ratepayers, therefore central Government will not intervene — otherwise than by statutory control and regulation, by those statutory definitions of policy that belong ultimately to the House —to curb or limit the extent to which in any particular place they decide so to do.

So I exhort the Government to return to the inner logic that should characterise their action, and to control Government expenditure and Government borrowing. If they say that they want to reduce taxation, they will find that that argument will lead them to the same conclusion, for it is upon the Government's own expenditure that the level of taxation for which the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have to ask next spring depends. So even if they take refuge in the argument that their policy is to reduce taxation, they are still destitute of defence for the assault that they have delivered on local government.

I have nearly done, and have only this to say. It may seem strange for a right hon. Member sitting on the Northern Ireland Bench to take time in a debate that concerns Great Britain. I say it is not only not strange but inevitable. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I were returned to say to the House that those whom we represent demand that there be restored to them the same democratic local government as is enjoyed in the rest of the United Kingdom. It would be an absurdity and a contradiction if we did not today use our voice and our vote against the destruction of the democratic principle, of local government in the rest of the United Kingdom.

4.37 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) gave us an interesting exposition how we might change our public sector borrowing requirement, but, with the greatest respect, I point out that the public sector, no matter whether it be central Government or local authority, is competing against investment in the private sector. Consequently, when the right hon. Gentleman says that if a local authority wants to overspend it can increase the rates, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that many people do not pay rates to their local authority because the rates are paid for them by the DHSS. This has a massive effect on the country's income.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *rose*—

Sir William Clark: No, I shall not give way.

The hysterical reaction of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to this matter is unbelievable. I cannot see what the fuss is about. I point out to my hon. Friends that one of the main planks of our last two election manifestos was an undertaking to control public expenditure, and we are doing so, although many Conservative Members still think that public expenditure in its totality, at 42 per cent. of GNP, is far too high and must come down. The statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is absolutely true. The figures produced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State were in the autumn statement, and they are proof positive that the Government have not changed their view. The autumn statement says that, next year, local authorities will spend £30 billion and that the capital expenditure by local authorities on services, including housing, will be £4 billion—there has been no alteration.

The Government have a responsibility to examine overspending. In 1983-84 the local authorities overspent by £368 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that this year's overspend will be about £500 million. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend announced that in 1985-86 local authorities will have to restrict their capital expenditure on services, including housing, to £4 billion.

People talk about reserves, but I do not believe that many of us understand what they are. The are not cash reserves. As my right hon. Friend said, the sale of council houses, land and such assets has produced a reserve of £5 billion in the hands of local authorities. Much of that money, although it is in reserve, has been lent to council tenants to buy their houses.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Clark: I shall not give way.

Some local authorities have been giving mortgages to purchase council houses, and in this case those mortgages canot be called in. People believe that the £5 billion is cash in reserve; it is not. Part of the money is in reserve, but not all of it. The bulk has been lent to the local authority to be used in its area or to other local authorities, and they

have used the money. Consequently, if authorities wanted to spend some of those reserves, they would have to call in some of those loans.

Mr. John Fraser *rose*——

Sir William Clark: I shall not give way. It would not be a bad idea if the Opposition waited.

If there were a massive calling in of loans to use the money to provide extra housing or other capital projects, the market would be affected. We must remember that, next year, the public sector borrowing requirement may increase. I believe that everyone, including my hon. Friends, would agree that it is high enough at £8·5 billion. Some of my hon. Friends would like more money to be spent on capital projects, and I can understand their point. We must find the money either by borrowing or by taxing, and I do not believe that we shall obtain the money by taxation.

Mr. Charles Irving (Cheltenham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir William Clark: I shall not give way.

Statements have been made about linking these reserves to the amount of capital expenditure. The Housing Act 1980 allows a council to spend up to 50 per cent. of receipts from the sale of assets, apart from the money that the council could generate itself. That percentage was reduced to 40 per cent. and then was reduced again to its present level of 20 per cent. It is incorrect to say that this is a new measure. It has been done since 1980. The same principle applies to the sale of land.

There is no question of taking these capital reserves from local authorities. The Government are saying merely that the pace at which those reserves are spent is to be restricted so that the public sector demands on the market are contained within the £8·5 billion limit. I am sure that all my hon. Friends would like increased capital expenditure, but I certainly would not like more capital expenditure at the expense of more taxation or borrowing.

I agree that public sector starts in house building have decreased. Last year, 167,400 houses were built by the private sector—a 10-year record. During the first nine months of 1984, construction industry output increased in real terms by 4·7 per cent. compared with 1983. In 1983, capital expenditure by the private and public sectors amounted to £45·5 billion in 1980 terms. That is not a bad record.

The Opposition talk sneeringly about home improvement grants, but they have little room to criticise this Government. In 1983-84, the Government spent £770 million of taxpayers' money on those grants.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth) *rose*——

Sir William Clark: During the last year of the term of the previous Labour Government, only £98 million was spent on those grants. False excitement has been generated by the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As he rightly pointed out, on 12 November the House agreed the autumn statement—no doubt the Opposition did not agree—and I should have thought that every hon. Member would agree that the public sector borrowing requirement should not be exceeded. We must support the Government in this issue. I remind those hon. Members who want to increase the public sector borrowing requirement that the national debt is costing the taxpayer £16·5 billion a year in interest alone. It would be folly to increase that debt.

The Government are to be commended on sticking religiously to their economic strategy, despite the wishes of vested interests, the Opposition, and so on. It is only because we have not been deflected from our purpose that we are now enjoying a rate of inflation which is the lowest for many years.

4.48 pm

Mr. Eric Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I wish to declare an interest. I believe that only three hon. Members are former construction workers—myself, as a member of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, my hon. Friend the member for Motherwell, North (Mr. Hamilton), who is sponsored by the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), who is a member of the Transport and General Workers Union. I have an interest in this subject from the angle of the construction workers and those who, like myself, when first married, lived for seven years in two rooms and therefore understand exactly what it means to be on a housing list and to live in overcrowded conditions without a proper home of one's own. That is why I was angry when I listened to the Government's statement yesterday.

To some extent I feel sorry for the Secretary of State because I do not think that he is the villain of the piece. I believe that the villain of the piece is the right hon. Gentleman who has just walked out of the Chamber—the Chancellor of the Exchequer—and who is backed by the Prime Minister. The Treasury, backed by the Prime Minister, is responsible for what the Government are doing today. I remember that the Secretary of State was asked to fight his corner—to fight for the industry. That call came not just from Opposition Members; it came clearly also from Conservative Members.

I give the Secretary of State his due. We were told that £600 million was likely to be cut from the housing budget. He undoubtedly put up a fight inside the Cabinet. We were all delighted—although not completely, because we did not want to see any cuts; we would have liked to see further investment in the construction industry—when he said that there was to be a reduction of only £75 million. The *National Builder* this month says:

"The Autumn Statement was better than at first feared."

The truth is, as one of my hon. Friends said yesterday, the Treasury has now got its revenge. I am not always in agreement with *The Guardian* but it said, rightly, I think:

"In yesterday's package the Treasury seized back £588 million in an accounting trick which is likely to deceive all but the closest observers."

I have a great deal of sympathy with the Conservative chairman of the Association of District Councils who, following the announcement, said:

"In the Autumn round of public expenditure decisions, the DOE claimed that £600 million of spending cuts had been avoided. Today's announcement gives that claim a hollow ring."

That is right. The Government—to use an Orwellian phrase—are using "doublethink" and "newspeak". In the debate on the Queen's Speech on 3 November 1982, the Prime Minister answered my right hon. Friend the

[Mr. Eric Heffer]

Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot)—before the general election of course, that is the important point—and said:

"We need more capital spending by local government and in the public sector generally."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1982; Vol. 31, c. 21.]

In a letter to Sir Jack Smart, then a prominent figure on the Association of Metropolitan Authorities—before the general election, of course—the Prime Minister said:

"Local authorities have been enabled, and indeed encouraged, to increase their capital expenditure by using capital receipts to supplement their capital allocation."

We are seeing the opposite of that policy being carried out today.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend will recall that when Liverpool city council was negotiating with the Secretary of State he told the council that although the Prime Minister was opposed to the spending of capital receipts, he was not. It was on that basis that Liverpool eventually found a solution to its problem. Does my hon. Friend see the announcement as a breach of faith with Liverpool?

Mr. Heffer: I do. I agree with my hon. Friend. It underlines the next point that I was going to make. Mr. George Smith, the president of the Institute of Housing, has said that local authorities had been

"the victims of a monstrous confidence trick."

That is the position in which we are today.

I have no doubt that many of my hon. Friends will rightly demand the Secretary of State's resignation. I do not care whether he resigns or not, and I will tell the House why. If he resigned, leaving the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister, we might have someone even worse. Just imagine that. With their majority, we might have someone even worse than we have now. I can see that happening.

It is interesting to read the exchanges that took place in the House yesterday afternoon. There were Conservative Members who regarded the policy as "voodoo economics". Only two Conservative Members defended their Front Bench. Conservative Members must do what many Labour Members did when our Government made drastic cuts in housing expenditure. We were prepared to get up and say that that was wrong. Conservative Members must not just say that the policy is wrong; they must show that it is by their vote. If they do not want to vote with the Opposition, they do not have to vote with the Government. It is the only way in which the Government will take notice of what is happening.

The Secretary of State said that the announcement goes to the heart of the Government's policy. He is right. I draw attention to what the Minister for Housing and Construction said to the Building Employers Confederation in London recently. I have a high personal regard for him, but politically I feel differently. Before he spoke, Mr. Millwood, the national president, said:

"In the last decade total construction output had fallen by around one-fifth while output of new work had dropped by no less than one-third. The effect on building employment of that drastic reduction in workload made even more sombre reading."

The Minister responded to that, and I want the House to listen carefully to what he said because it is at the heart of the Government's philosophy. It is reported in this month's *National Builder* that he said:

"Employment creation is not in itself enough to justify public spending on construction, nor for that matter on anything else."

That is at the heart of the Government's argument. They are not interested in investment in the construction industry, as a Conservative Member said yesterday, to create homes and employment for the people. When some of us have said that the Government have used unemployment as a weapon, we have been told that that is exaggeration, but that is a clear statement by the Minister, and it is the essence of the Government's position.

I speak as a construction worker. There are 400,000 of my people—construction workers—out of work. Many of them are highly skilled. Many of them have been out of work for well over a year and in some cases two and three years. Thousands of young working couples wanting a home are on a waiting list. They are living in appalling and overcrowded conditions. Many of them have no hope of having a home for five or six years or even longer. Many are living in homes that need improvements and repairs. The Government have affected all those people. The Government must be prepared to change their policy. If not, the right hon. Gentleman should cease to be Secretary of State and the Government should go out of office to give those of us who want investment in the construction industry the opportunity to get our people back to work.

5 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): It is a pleasure for me to find myself once again in full agreement with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I, like him, have been a monetarist for many years—indeed, ever since I was assistant to Professor Hayek, who I think is well regarded by my colleagues on the Government Front Bench. I have always made a distinction, as the right hon. Gentleman did when a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the monetarist policy that the Conservative Government carried on, between good and bad monetarism. That is a distinction that sometimes my right hon. Friends and the Secretary of State for the Environment have failed to make. The argument that he advanced today is bad monetarism and irrational economic nonsense. It should be dismissed for the reasons outlined by the right hon. Member for South Down, which I warmly support.

The right hon. member for South Down referred to a factor which has been central to the policy of both Conservative and Labour Governments for many years. As Professor Hayek wrote in his great work, "The Road to Serfdom", we cannot have real democracy without effective and real local government. That is what the debate is all about. Many of us on the Conservative Benches have been worried for a long time about the growing divergence between central Government and local authorities which, for generation after generation, have worked together in partnership. They have certainly not worked always in absolute agreement, but there has been an understanding of each other's points of view and problems. That is why we have been so disturbed by the nature and manner of the statement that was made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

My right hon. Friend's statement appeared irrational, and it can be considered erratic in the context of the request made by the Government—it was made in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and in the

speeches of other Ministers—to the local authorities to quicken and increase capital expenditure. What could be more irrational than to urge local authorities in January to increase capital expenditure by March? It is impossible for local authorities, companies, Governments or any other organisations to plan capital expenditure, except on a rational long-term basis against the background of some consistency of policy from the Government.

The money is in the hands of the local authorities in the sense that I regard my money to be in my own hands when I sell my house and lend the money to a bank at a high rate of interest, happily, thanks to the Government. Having done so, I do not consider it wrong to say, "I want the money back because I want to build a new house." The money is available, so that is M1.

Secondly, we have the men. There is no question of too much pressure being placed on the labour force. We have M1, the money, and M2, the men. Thirdly, we have M3, the materials. I suggest that that is a much more rational concept of economics than the motorway madness, as I used to call it, of M1, M2 and M3 statistics.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to say—I think that I understood him aright although it was rather noisy at the time—about bringing orders before the House and providing the opportunity for debate. Of course, we want to be helpful to my right hon. Friend. I do not want a vote on the Adjournment of the House to hold up all the other important discussions that are to take place this evening. I do not think that I can vote on that Question this evening, but I am prepared to abstain. However, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends and I want to leave entirely open the attitude that we shall take to the orders that my right hon. Friend lays before the House. Much will depend on his ability to give the assurance for which I asked—that the Government will consider the problems of the inner cities, some of which are great and desperate, in a broad way. In other words, between now and the laying of the orders, I hope that clear undertakings will be given to local authorities that my right hon. Friend's use of "flexible" means that if their needs can be proved they will be met, because of need, not loyalty.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The announcement that I made yesterday had nothing to do with the substantial sums that the Government have earmarked for the urban programme. Those sums will not be affected by the statement, and the Government will continue to make them available. there will be an increasing concentration on the partnership and programme areas. In that respect, I can go quite a long way to meet my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Rippon: I am grateful for that. I have no doubt that that issue can be clarified further in subsequent discussions with local authorities before the orders are laid. Many of us are concerned that the necessary dialogue between the Government and local authority associations is not taking place. If there is further clarification on the issue to which my right hon. Friend referred, and an indication that where a case can be made a local authority will be allowed to use in a proper way more of its capital receipts, it may not be necessary to vote against the orders.

5.6 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am happy to be called by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon), because I think that I can speak with some authority on behalf of the inner city areas he referred to. Only 2·6 per cent. of the housing in my constituency is owner-occupied, and nowhere in Britain is there a constituency with a lower percentage. There are only four areas in Britain where the council sector is a larger proportion than in my constituency. It is over 80 per cent. in Southwark and Bermondsey. It seems to my constituents, and those of many other hon. Members, that we are debating two main issues, one being economic and one social.

Perhaps the best way to encapsulate what has been said so far is to say that the prophecy made in the autumn of 1983 by the president of the National Federation of Building Trades Employers has been fulfilled. The president warned that Treasury pressure would undermine the Government's housing policies. We have now arrived at a position at which the only available economic arguments seem also not to carry weight. If the best that the Government can do is to put up their Back Bench chairman of the finance committee to advance arguments that are spurious and points that are misleading, they had better change some of the officers who advise the Conservative party on economic affairs.

The arguments about the balance of expenditure between central Government and local government make it necessary first to remember that central Government have been by far the worse culprit. The local authorities have not been overspending considerably in excess of targets but that sort of spending has been carried on from Whitehall. It is only since the Government came to power in 1979 that we have had controls on local authority capital expenditure. We have not had the present system under any other Government, and the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) was wrong to intimate otherwise. First there was 50 per cent. control, then it was 40 per cent. and now we are told it is 20 per cent.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: How do the Government answer three questions that arise from the debate and which have been asked by various organisations and writers? First, how do they answer the question that is put in today's edition of the *Financial Times*? When the local authorities are financing from capital receipts, they are not financing from borrowing because the money is available to them and is not locked away elsewhere. How does that financing undermine the Government's economic strategy? That strategy does not require the moneys to be drawn from another source. They are present and available to local authorities and they are not, as the hon. Member for Croydon, South suggested, being lent out by local authorities to their tenants to finance mortgages. Most of the mortgages that are made available under the right-to-buy scheme are from building societies, not local councils.

Dr. Hampson: My intervention is almost redundant but I think that the hon. Gentleman will wish to put the record straight. The present system, which stems from 1980 legislation, is much freer and flexible than its predecessor. Until the 1980 legislation, there had been project controls by individual central Government Departments on everything spent by local authorities. That

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system was reformed and the new flexibility allowed authorities to move their capital receipts between various sectors.

Mr. Hughes: In one respect, some flexibility was introduced between the different blocks of spending, but there was another element that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) criticised so validly — the power of central Government to intervene in an unparalleled way in 1980, under the 1980 Act — in theory, and, since then, increasingly in practice—in the moneys, expenditure patterns and democratically made decisions of local authorities up and down the country.

I should like to ask the Minister the second question. Is it or is it not the view of the Treasury and its colleagues in other Departments that money spent on house building and home repair is a very good investment, in simple economic, financial and accounting terms as well as everything else? This figure is one of the most authoritative that I have recently seen. Is it not right that for every £100 million invested in construction, one saves about £75 million in taxation and social security benefits by taking people out of the dole queue and giving people the opportunity to live in a home of their own? If that is not right, how is it that there are criticisms from people who work in the industry—for example, only a couple of weeks ago from the president of the Building Employers Confederation — that at the moment 400,000 construction workers are being paid £600 million by the Government this year in dole money for doing nothing while the housing stock is sliding into decay and disrepair?

I have a last question for the Government. When the Secretary of State answered a question of mine on his trailer statement on the subject in July, he referred to the moneys that the Government would save by the announcement. He said that the percentage had been reduced

"so that we would have a larger slice to reallocate to those authorities which did not have the same opportunities for sales as others."

The right hon. Gentleman concluded:

"I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would give the Government some credit for that."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1984; Vol. 64, c. 336-37.]

I should like to pursue the question asked by the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham. Does the Secretary of State's reply mean that authorities such as mine, which have a large amount of public sector housing stock, most of which are flats, most of which are in high-rise blocks and therefore most of which will not be and have not been bought, will be the beneficiaries of the moneys that the Government are now saving? Or was what I was told in July a lie, because the whole exercise was designed simply to save central Government funds and put the central accounts in what the Government regard as some sort of order? If this is getting the Government off the backs of the people, which appeared to be the motto upon which the Government went to the people and secured a reduction in their vote last year, it is a funny sort of non-interference.

The social arguments are no less valid than the economic ones. How is it possible to justify the halving in London of the provision of public housing investment since the Government came to office? I accept that my borough is unusual because it has the largest public housing sector stock in London. In 1979-80, it received £54,068 million in Government support, which was reduced last year to £31 million, and will be reduced again. How is that justifiable when there is such a substantial need and all the figures prove that? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are rightly saying that there is mismanagement. Of course there is, and I am the first to criticise it. However, that does not justify the Government not putting money into housing when there is still a substantial need. If the Government made a substantial effort it would have immediate results in increasing employment and providing housing for our people.

The programme that we put to the electorate last year was similar in one respect to that of some other opposition parties, in that we said that what was needed was a substantial increase in public sector borrowing to make our country's infrastructure such that we would be allowed to prosper and not decline. Sewers, housing, roads and buildings are our national assets. It is ludicrous for the Government to say that they are unworthy of investment, just as it is appalling for them to preside over their perpetual decline.

One or two weeks ago the Minister for Housing and Construction used a phrase that may remain for a long time in hon. Members' memories. He said that the Government's policies in a certain area were designed to introduce into our national life the magic of the market place. This policy is the monetarism of the madhouse. It is economically, politically and socially mad. I accept that it is not even true to the Government's declared policy and philosophy and it certainly is not true to what the Government declared was their commitment to the people. If they do not believe me, I should like to tell the Government this. Compared with all the housing programmes and housing investment of all our partners in western Europe, it is in this country that the people are most miserably housed and where the smallest proportion of gross national product is spent on housing. I obtained the figures on that from Vol. 64 of *Hansard*. This country should therefore start to correct and not ignore the appalling disrepair and mismanagement of our assets, for which the Government and their predecessors in 1979 have been responsible.

We believe that improving the nation's housing stock would not only make a positive contribution to the well-being of the United Kingdom but create a better way of life for all sectors of our community. If the Government refuse to respond today, I hope that they will think again over Christmas and decide that they should alter their course, with a resolution not to be so stupid in the new year.

5.16 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkstone and Hythe): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke of the Government's objective of getting off the backs of the people. His thinking and that of many of his hon. Friends and other Opposition Members is bedevilled by the fact that he confuses the people with local authorities. The Government's objective is indeed to get off the backs of the people, by trying to keep rates, taxes and interest rates as low as possible. It is sometimes necessary to intervene in the way in which local authorities conduct their affairs to achieve those objectives.

Having listened to what has been said by Opposition Members, one might suppose that this was the first occasion on which central Government have sought to intervene in this way to control the expenditure of local authorities.

That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right to remind the House about the events of 1976. We have the benefit of the account that has been given to us by Lord Barnett, who was then Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We can obtain the flavour of those events, particularly through the description of Cabinet meetings, in which the exchanges culminated in bitter controversy over the issue of whether the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) would sell his own grandmother or ask Lord Barnett to do that work for him. However, that is a reminder of the fact that all Governments have recognised that it is an important and central part of their responsibilities to control public spending as a whole, and that includes the spending of local authorities.

It is in the context of the Government's overall economic policy that one has to examine and assess the proposals before the House. It is predictable that Opposition Members should seek to make political capital out of the fact that control of public spending often means that it is necessary to postpone desirable projects, but, given the failure of Opposition Members when they were in government to achieve so many desirable objectives that they themselves set, their extravagant language on the matter will be heavily discounted by anyone who does not share their partisan point of view.

We have to see how the proposals before us fit in with the Government's overall economic policy. That is why I am somewhat puzzled by the criticisms advanced by so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, especially as so many of them supported the Government in the Division after the debate on the autumn statement less than a fortnight ago. The proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday were foreshadowed in the autumn statement and form a central part of the strategy at the heart of that statement. That must be taken fully into account in any assessment of the proposals.

Mr. Irving: I am most interested in my hon. and learned Friend's speech and am listening carefully to every word of it, but I do not quite understand what he is talking about. I do not recall there being anything about this in the autumn statement — unless it was in the same jingle-jangle language as the rate support grant proposals, so that people could not understand it. Local authorities were told previously that the money that they contributed to the pool would be at their disposal. The Secretary of State has repeated today that that money will be "available" to local authorities—but they will not be able to spend it. Why?

Mr. Howard: I shall tell my hon. Friend why. The matter is dealt with in paragraph 2.29 of the autumn statement. If local authorities spend an unlimited amount of money, less money will be available for the private sector — [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Other things being equal, that means that interest rates will be higher than they otherwise would be. That remains the case whether the money being spent by local authorities is borrowed or is derived from the proceeds of selling council houses or other assets. In any event, the money is being spent, and it is thus not available to be borrowed by the private sector. That is why interest rates would be higher than would otherwise be the case. Local authority treasurers do not sleep with that money under their mattresses. It is either used to diminish existing borrowing or put on deposit and is available to be borrowed by the private sector. If that source of finance is removed, less money will be available to be borrowed and interest rates will be higher.

Mr. Rippon: Paragraph 2.29 of the autumn statement says:

"The outlook for local authority capital spending in 1984-85 is uncertain. Early returns suggested a large overspend on cash limits in England and Wales, and local authorities were asked to restrain spending, and to generate extra receipts. Net provision for Great Britain in 1985-86 is about £3·1 billion. This is a reduction from Cmnd. 9143 of about £600 million, to take account of the 1983-84 overspend and of increased receipts"—

to which I would add, which, to the best of our knowledge and belief, they will be allowed to spend.

Mr. Howard: The figure for Great Britain is indeed £3·1 billion. The figure given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday represents the proportion for England. There is a reduction from Cmnd. 9143 of the amount stated, and it certainly takes account of the previous year's overspend and increased receipts.

Dr. Hampson: There are a couple of distortions that my hon. and learned Friend seems not to have considered. No one is arguing for unlimited freedom to spend capital assets, but we all know that local authorities borrow against capital assets. Moreover, as they are gaining interest on them, that revenue can be and is spent on current account. The Government constantly argue that current account spending is running away and should be controlled while capital spending should be increased, but the current proposals positively encourage the reverse.

Mr. Howard: That is one of the matters to be taken into account. If the money were spent in the year under discussion, less would be available for future years and pressure of interest rates on local authority current account payments would be that much heavier and more difficult in the future.

I hope that the whole House will welcome the objective of keeping interest rates as low as possible in the cause of job preservation and creation. In all our constituencies there are many businesses on the cusp of profitability. If interest rates were raised, they might well cease to operate or have to make workers redundant. That would increase unemployment. There are also businesses contemplating new projects and people contemplating starting new businesses. Interest rates are a critical component in the costs that those people have to take into account in making their decisions.

It is all very well for my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) and others to share the general approbation of the attempt to reduce interest rates, but it is one thing to say that that is a good thing and quite another to will the means for that end. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot permit himself the luxury of that mental dichotomy between the means and the end. He has to make the connection between the two, and that connection is embodied in the autumn statement that so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends supported less than a fortnight ago. The proposals now before us represent a central part of the strategy embodied in that statement. If one wants lower interest rates, one must will the means and accept the sometimes uncomfortable consequences of so doing.

Mr. Straw: Even within the hon. and learned Gentleman's view of the money market as a closed system in which crowding out pushes up interest rates, does he not realise that, although holding cash balances in local authorities may reduce interest rates, the reduction in orders and the increased borrowing by companies that this

[Mr. Straw]

causes will increase interest rates? If the money were transferred from local authority balances to construction company balances, the result would be more construction, more people back at work and an increase in company liquidity without any overall increase in interest rates.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman leaves out of account the overriding importance of encouraging at every turn the wealth-creating private sector of the economy. That is best achieved by pursuing policies that will keep interest rates as low as possible.

I stood for election 18 months ago on a manifesto containing the following words:

"We shall maintain firm control of public spending and borrowing. If Government borrows too much, interest rates rise, and so do mortgage payments. Less spending by Government leaves more room to reduce taxes on families and businesses."

I am proud to have been elected to the House on that manifesto, and I adhere to its commitments. That is why I supported the Government in the Division after the debate on the autumn statement and that is why I shall support the Government today.

5.28 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): While the hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) was speaking, one of my hon. Friends suggested to me that the hon. and learned Gentleman was trying to become the new Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. John Fraser: No—just Creep of the Year.

Mr. Winnick: If that was indeed the hon. and learned Gentleman's purpose, I must say that I doubt whether he would have any more success at the Dispatch Box than the present Secretary of State.

We should be grateful to the Secretary of State for the Environment for one thing only—turning the spotlight on the present appalling housing situation. I had often wondered how long it would be before the media and others outside the House turned their attention to the situation in the building industry and the difficulties faced by so many people as a result of the housing shortage.

Ministers often refer—the Secretary of State did so today — to what happened under the Labour Government. They try to use that as an excuse for what is happening at present. It is true that there was a decline in public sector house building under the Labour Government—I would not wish to deny the obvious, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has made the same point — but it is interesting to note that in 1978, after that decline had taken place, there were 107,000 housing starts in the public sector. By 1981, under the present Government, the figure was just 37,000. The estimated number of public sector housing starts in 1984 is 40,000. There is no comparison between what happened under the Labour Government — even bearing in mind the decline that took place between 1976 and the time the Labour Government left office — and what has occurred under the present Government.

It is possible that, as a result of yesterday's statement, the number of public sector starts in 1985 will be 36,000, or less. It is interesting to note, too, that there will be fewer starts in the private sector this year than in 1978.

So far, I have dealt with the national position. In Walsall borough no contracts have been entered into for new council house building since 1979. As a result, an increasing number of people there have to wait to be rehoused. In many cases, tenants have to wait for many years before any improvements are made to their pre-war council dwellings.

Nationally the position is appalling. The House should be very concerned about the cuts that are to be made in addition to all the previous cuts. In England, last year, it is estimated that 78,000 households were accepted by local authorities as being homeless. In London, more than 2,000 homeless families were using bed-and-breakfast hotels as temporary accommodation last summer. The cost of such temporary accommodation in London alone is estimated at £12 million a year.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): What about shortholds?

Mr. Winnick: Instead of shouting from a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) should bear the facts in mind. That money would pay off the loan charges of 3,000 rented homes costing £30,000 each.

Mr. Marlow *rose*—

Mr. Winnick: I shall not give way, because of time.

There are other categories of people about whom we should be deeply concerned. There is the plight of the young, young marrieds. If young couples cannot obtain a mortgage and if the local authority is unable to rehouse them, they will probably not have adequate accommodation. There may be nowhere for them to live. That appalling situation is one more reason why a proper housing drive should be undertaken.

There are also families with young children in my constituency and, of course, in many other areas, living in high-rise flats, who wait for years on end to be rehoused in rented houses. It is all very well for Ministers to talk about the number of dwellings sold. Almost without exception, those dwellings have been houses, not high-rise flats.

Many homes remain unfit. I have received some figures from Shelter on the subject. The Minister for Housing and Construction should be deeply concerned about the problem. Nearly a million homes are unfit for human habitation. Nearly a million homes lack one or more basic amenities. Nearly 4 million need substantial repairs. The number of homes needing expensive repairs—repairs that will cost more than £2,500—has risen by over 20 per cent. in five years. The situation, therefore, is extremely serious.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is presenting a most realistic appraisal of the situation. However, he has not mentioned the fact that last year we cleared only 0·1 per cent. of the housing stock. As the houses now being built in the private sector will not last for a thousand years, we are storing up trouble for the future.

Mr. Winnick: I take my hon. Friend's point.

I do not blame the Minister for Housing and Construction. The real culprit is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, it was leaked to the press, before the autumn statement was made, that if there was to be a cut of £600 million, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) intended to resign. The story was never denied. It appears that the cut is to amount to over £400 million. The hon. Gentleman should remember the stories that appeared

in the press, which I took to be true. As a housing Minister, he has duties and responsibilities. I certainly do not see how he can carry out his duties after the statement made yesterday by the Secretary of State.

Like all my hon. Friends, and many Conservative Members as well, I find it difficult to understand how when so many people are desperately in need of new accommodation or repairs to their homes, nearly 25 per cent. of building workers can be on the dole. What justification can there be for allowing so many people to remain on the dole when they could be building and improving the homes so urgently needed for our people?

We must always bear in mind how much money is paid out in total in unemployment and supplementary benefit to people in the dole queues. How can the Government be serious about trying to reduce unemployment when, as a result of yesterday's statement, so many more building workers will join the dole queue during 1985?

I find it difficult to envisage how historians in future will write about these days. How will they explain the present Government's refusal to allow local authorities to spend their own capital receipts—not borrowed money—on providing the dwellings that are needed, while at the same time the Government are spending overall such large sums on supplementary and unemployment benefit? It is no wonder that, when the Secretary of State made his statement yesterday, hardly any Conservative Members defended the Government's position. At most, two Conservative Members did so, including the hon. Member for Northampton, North.

Conservative Members who refuse today to support what is, in essence, a Treasury diktat to the Secretary of State for the Environment will be not only doing a service to the homeless and to others in acute housing need, but showing that, unlike the Secretary of State, they cannot vote for an economic absurdity. I hope that a sufficient number of Conservative Members will demonstrate their independence as Back Benchers by refusing to support measures that can only harm the country and substantially increase unemployment.

5.38 pm

Mr. Peter Hubbard-Miles (Bridgend): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling an hon. Member who represents a Welsh constituency. Local government in Wales might have something to teach English local authorities. Anyone who has been involved in local government for some time must have concluded that the breakneck acceleration in local government spending during the 1960s and 1970s could not have continued indefinitely. Most of the years that I have spent in local government have been punctuated by dire warnings from Ministers in successive Governments. Those warnings started with our being told that the party was over.

I have served on a large county council in Wales and am a member of a Welsh district council. I am surprised to be taking part in a debate on an Opposition motion that criticises the Government for cuts in capital expenditure. If any party has acquired expertise in the use of the knife, it is the Labour party. It has been responsible for much heavier cuts in local government capital expenditure than the present Government.

If there were any Welsh Labour Members present, I should not apologise for reminding them of when the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) trekked around housing authorities in Wales boasting of the Labour Government's intention to expand the capital investment programme. He urged us to spend, spend, spend. He cheerily waved as he told us to go out and try to break the bank. Only a few short weeks later we received the bad news that the bank was broke. We then received the worse news that no houses had been built and that the programme had been scrapped.

In July 1976 the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) announced cuts of £1·012 million, four fifths of which was in capital spending, and which the Treasury admitted cost 150,000 jobs. Further cuts of £800 million in 1977-78 and £1·5 million in 1978-79, about half of which were in capital spending, caused the loss of another 140,000 jobs.

In 1973-74, Welsh capital spending was 42 per cent. of revenue spending but in 1978-79, when Labour was in office, it had been reduced to 18 per cent. of revenue spending. So much for the bleatings of Opposition Members about the need for more capital expenditure. They support policies that produce a level of revenue spending that precludes any increase in capital spending. In Wales, capital spending has increased from £226 million in 1978-79 to £388·5 million——

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Give the figures in real terms.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was in the council chamber when the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney announced his expansion of capital spending. He was the first to welcome that tremendous expansion in housing investment but had to apologise later when the programme was scrapped.

Mr. Powell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: I cannot give way because time is short.

Mr. Powell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: No. I shall consider a local authority that the hon. Member for Ogmore knows well——

Mr. Powell: Give way, then.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Hubbard-Miles) is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Powell: But he has mentioned me.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: The local authority of which the hon. Member for Ogmore was a member for a time increased its capital expenditure——

Mr. Powell: But how many more homeless people are there in Ogmore now?

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: I shall answer that question later.

In 1982-83, Ogmore borough council's capital expenditure was £12 million. In 1983-84, it was £17 million—an increase of 40 per cent. I am sure that Opposition Members will say that that is a great thing and that the authority is providing services. However, not one penny of that increase was spent on housing. The Labour party in the local authority which the hon. Member for Ogmore knows so well got its priorities right, like all other Labour-controlled authorities in south Wales, and spent the increase on new council offices and leisure centres. So much for the Labour party's caring about homeless people

[Mr. Hubbard-Miles]

in south Wales. The Ogmore council's projected spend for next year is £21 million—a further increase of 24 per cent. Only a fraction of it is to go into housing.

I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have a great deal of sympathy with Conservatives in south Wales. They recognise that we have to live with extravagant and profligate councils that are so heavily Labour-controlled. If I were to tell ratepayers in my constituency that the local authority was prudent and budgeted wisely, they would laugh in my face. They believe the local authority to be profligate.

Mr. Powell: They will be laughing in the hon. Gentleman's face at the next general election.

Mr. Hubbard-Miles: I did not lose my community council seat and I was not defeated in the borough elections. The hon. Member for Ogmore will remember those elections. Although ratepayers think that local authorities in my area are profligate, if Welsh local authorities had increased their current expenditure last year in line with their English counterparts, they would have spent £66 million more — equivalent to an additional rate burden of 24p in the pound.

As a result of Welsh local authorities' comparatively wise budgeting, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has been able to release resources for a wide range of capital schemes. For 1984-85, Government expenditure plans amount to £84 per head—45 per cent. above the equivalent figure for England. The lesson from Wales to English local authorities is that English authorities have eaten their seed corn and have too often followed high-spending, extreme and extravagant Socialist priorities. I welcome the fact that, as a result of overall restraint by Welsh local authorities on public expenditure, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to announce a more flexible and generous capital settlement this year. I also welcome what, for me, is one of the most important aspects of the English and Welsh proposals—the fact that those proposals build much more flexibility into the capital control system.

The Labour Government and the present Government have overspent and underspent. As a result they have had to take midstream corrective measures. Both Governments have witnessed resources being wasted through underspending — there was an £85 million underspend in housing in the two years 1981-83 — and both Governments have had to act because overspending was likely to send the economy out of control.

The advantage of the present proposals is that they afford longer lead times for the planning of capital expenditure by local authorities; a higher proportion of underspend can now be carried forward into the following year; and a modest amount of overspending will not upset the programme. This is important because there are bound to be occasions when vital and unforeseen projects will have to be carried out when the local authority will find that it has already committed its total capital allocation. If the need for mid-term intervention can be eliminated, that will be a great step forward. It will avoid the need for local authorities to commit the bulk of their capital allocation as early as possible in the financial year, thereby avoiding any possibility of restraints midstream. That is what presently happens.

My own local authority, in the first three months of the year, contractually committed £11 million out of its total capital allocation of £17 million. That produces a distorted picture of the pattern of capital spending.

It has been argued that the reduction in the prescribed proportion of capital receipts in England to 20 per cent. will affect the number of council house sales, but Wales has lived with a figure of 25 per cent. for a long time. That is now to be reduced to 15 per cent., but Wales has sold a larger proportion of its housing stock than England.

The Labour party's record on capital housing in Wales is dismal. The protestations of Labour Members about the reduction in the prescribed proportion is hypocritical, because as my right hon. Friend said, if they had their way there would be no capital receipts. If only for those two reasons, I intend to support the Government tonight.

5.52 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am glad to have this opportunity of following the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Hubbard-Miles), if only to apologise to the people of Wales for the fact that some Welsh Conservative Members, who are so totally uncritical of what the Government have proposed, are capable of making crawling, uncritical speeches such as the one we have just heard. We did not hear a word from the hon. Gentleman about the rights of Welsh local authorities to determine what to do with their resources. I wonder what his friends on the councils that he used to mix with will think about that.

The hon. Gentleman merely looked backwards to what happened in the 1970s. It was wrong then, and it is wrong now, and two wrongs do not make a right. He criticised profligate councils in his own area for what they have done in the past and more recently, but the answer should remain in the hands of the local electorate who have the right to vote such authorities in or out of office. That is what democracy is about. It is no use the hon. Gentleman pouring out his venom towards those councils simply because the Conservative party failed to take control of the local authority in his area.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn) *rose*——

Mr. Wigley: I shall not give way, just as the hon. Member for Bridgend did not give way, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to catch the eye of the Chair.

Yesterday, when the Secretary of State for Wales made his announcement, I had the opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the reduction in capital expenditure in Wales since 1979. The papers that have been supplied to the House show that capital expenditure in Wales for the next three years will be £349 million, £351 million and £345 million respectively—about £1 billion over three years, or an average of £330 million per annum — compared with £440 million per annum from 1979 to 1984. That is a reduction in capital expenditure which Wales can ill afford.

I realise that part of the problem arises from the success of the Government's repair and renovation policy, which presented opportunities for the people of Wales, whose housing stock is appreciably worse than the average housing stock in the United Kingdom as a whole. We have been told that 1 million houses are substandard in Britain as a whole. In Wales, the figure is almost 100,000.

Therefore, 5 per cent. of the population has 10 per cent. of the problem, and the aging housing stock in Wales reflects the old industrial patterns of many south Wales areas.

Out of that repair and renovation policy came a tremendous demand for money. I concede that the grants available were extremely attractive. The tragedy was that having given this promise before the general election in 1983, the Government subsequently failed to make the money available, and thousands of people in Wales who expected to carry out renovation programmes have been unable to do so. Some have been caught in the impossible position of having to wait six, seven or eight years before the money will be available.

The small Dwyfor district council area had asked for £1·25 million capital, but is to get only £605,000 for housing. Within the £1·25 million for which it asked, £500,000 was to deal with 130 applicants for repair grants, even though it received a total of 710 applications. Although only a small fraction of the number of applicants would have been catered for, the Government have given half what the council asked for. It will therefore be virtually impossible for any of those 710 people to be paid. Even though they have a right to expect it, hardly any of them will receive the money next year. That is the net effect on the ground of the policy which the Government are pursuing.

Dwyfor also has a contractual obligation for a refuse disposal unit, but it will be extremely difficult to meet that commitment, given the settlement that has just been announced.

There is a similar pattern in the Arfon borough council area. Even though 1,100 people had a legitimate and legal right to a repair grant, only 250 at most will be dealt with next year. The other 850 will have to wait for a second or third year until the grants are paid. That just is not good enough.

In fact, money is available. As the Secretary of State for Wales said last year, when speaking about capital allocations for 1984-85:

"Local authorities can, of course, augment the spending power of those allocations by the use of capital receipts".

He made that promise to Parliament, yet he has now gone back on it. The right hon. Gentleman is in breach of promise, and as a result local authorities which took him at his word have been caught with the responsibilities but without the resources to meet them. Indeed, capital resources for local authorities are reaching the same state as post-war credits—after the depression is over, those resources will be unfrozen and local authorities may have a hope of doing something with them.

The first issue at stake is the freedom of local authorities to use money which they rightly thought would be theirs, and which the Secretary of State told them would be theirs to spend. That will now be cut to the bare bone. A couple of hundred million pounds will be held up which could be pumped into the economy to meet the cost of housing, education and the other capital projects in Wales.

Secondly, there is the effect that this announcement will have on the thousands of people who need to have this work done, not to mention the effect it will have on the 40,000 building employees at present out of work. They could have looked to the Government for the money to be used to alleviate the social problems facing many families and the unemployment problems now facing building workers. Many small building companies will now go bankrupt because of the drying up of funds from the Government's capital programme.

The third issue is the effect on the economy. It appears that the Government think that this is necessary in the context of the PSBR, but we are really seeing money taken from the private sector as a result of the sale of council houses. We are debating today a necessary corollary of the programme of selling council houses. The Government did not envisage that by selling council houses they would be taking millions of pounds out of the private sector to pay for them. The assets remain, but they have been transferred from the public to the private sector. The money has gone the other way. Capital resources are now at the disposal of local authorities, which could use that money to build other capital resources for the community. The balance would then be the same.

Approximately the same proportion of money's-worth of capital resources would be in the public sector as in the private sector. However, less money is available in the private sector. Some private money has been dried up by the transfer to the public sector for the purchase of council houses. The point that the Government do not like is that there is less money in the private sector. It does not make any difference to the public sector borrowing requirement. It is as broad as it is long. However, the consequence of the policy of selling council houses on the availability of finance in the private sector is hitting the Government. Instead of sticking to dogma, they ought to release this money and get it to work for both economic reasons—employment—and social reasons—housing.

6.1 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I have a suspicion, following the speech of the hon. Member for Caernarfon, (Mr. Wigley), that the Treasury is rubbing its hands with glee. Far from not recognising what was likely to happen, I feel sure that it felt unhappy in 1980 when local authorities were given greater freedom over the use of their capital receipts. The Treasury felt that to give such freedom to local authorities would create problems. The success of the policy of selling council houses in particular — most of the £5 billion came from council house receipts — is now a cause of embarrassment. I fail to understand, however, why we are raising the matter on a hypothetical overspend for 1985-86. At times we have encouraged more spending. Why should we antagonise yet again our friends in the local authorities? They are upset because it was part of the deal to give them greater freedom on the capital side when we imposed tighter restrictions on the current side. It was argued that we had to tighten up much more on current account as a result of the passing of the 1980 Act.

What is happening to housing? The figures are depressing. There is a 23 per cent. reduction on the same quarter last year on the public sector housing side and an 8 per cent. reduction on the same quarter last year on the private side. That would be understandable and acceptable if there were a commensurate increase for home improvements, the policy adopted by several of my right hon. Friends. They accepted a reduction in new building because of the massive increase in home improvements. There was a fourfold increase in home improvement grants during the first four years of this Government. They have been reduced from 90 to 75 per cent. The rate of home improvement grants is slowing down. At the same time,

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

there is a slowing down of new building. Consequently, there is a dampening of economic activity in housing. My right hon. Friend's approach will psychologically dampen down prospects even further.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Member therefore support a move requiring local authorities to stop selling council houses because this will only lead in the future to greater embarrassment?

Dr. Hampson: No, quite the contrary. I should like there to be greater freedom within ceilings for local authorities to use their assets as they wish. The Secretary of State for the Environment deserves a great deal of praise —I am glad that he is here to hear me say this—for the way in which he defended the housing investment programme. However, there is a certain irony about the fact that although we refer to the housing investment allocation, it is not an allocation of cash but an authorisation to borrow. The permission to borrow is held up while at the same time local authorities are restricted in their freedom to use the cash which is in their hands. That distortion is even more acute when that cash, put on deposit, generates revenue. It results in interest charges, which provides them with more revenue to spend upon current account. Minister after Minister has said that most of all we have to get to grips with the current expenditure of local authorities. There was a graph which showed current account spiralling out of control, with capital account being crucified and falling away rapidly. What is the sense of our present approach when we ought to be encouraging the use of cash assets and controlling the current account of local authorities?

The first-class speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) put superbly the Treasury case for job creation. However, is the fact that these assets are available for private companies to draw on and hence, theoretically, to create jobs, the most effective way in the real world of creating jobs as a matter of urgency? Or is it not the case that if the same money were allocated to private companies for the construction of houses and for home improvements it would create jobs immediately? The person who carried out my home alterations told me that every time he is given a contract to modernise bathrooms in council houses which were built in the 1930s he hires at least 12 to 20 extra unskilled people, in a pocket of unemployment, in order to fulfil those contracts. This money is creating jobs, but which is the right way to create them? This casts real doubt upon the PESC theology relating to what is public expenditure over that period. My right hon. Friend has not yet convinced me that his proposals are worthy of support.

6.7 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Conservative Members have given very little encouragement to the districts and metropolitan areas where the hurt is felt most. Yesterday's statement by the Secretary of State, and today's contribution, leave no doubt about what is in the mind of the Government and the effect that it will have upon those who want new housing, particularly in the rented sector, and its effect upon improvement grants. There is also the question of the capitalisation of repairs and the infrastructure. The claim made by the Secretary of State will affect the destinies of many people. The consequences of the Secretary of State's actions will shatter the hopes of those who want rented accommodation. His statement will add further to the despair of those who want grants from local authorities for improvements and repairs to property. It is a further blow to the construction industry. Both the public and the private sectors have appealed to the Government for a capital injection into the construction industry.

Minutes before the statement was made yesterday, a meeting was held between the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir George Young), and the Institute of Maintenance and Building Management, at which the members of the institute appealed to the Minister to give special consideration to the construction industry because of the effects that the statement will have on the industry and because the restrictions applied by the Government will reduce still further the low level of investment in both the public and private sectors of the industry.

Conservative Members have referred to partnership agreements. They have been tried, but no real help is given to existing partnership agreements. The training needs of the industry have to be considered. The industry has been decimated because it is denied the required capital expenditure. If there is no training, the practical, experienced people who are required to make sure that the industry can continue to function effectively will not be available. That is because of the way in which the Government have been attacking the construction industry. Conservative Members have claimed that this is the first cut in the capital programme, but I remind the House that there have been capital and revenue cuts in local government for many years under this Government. The latest cut is a further blow to democracy in local government.

The Secretary of State said that there had been a 4 per cent. growth in the building industry in the past year. But a 4 per cent. growth from a low base means little, and that is how the captains and workers in the industry view the Secretary of State's statement. Unless the Government help the industry, there will be redundancies and more unemployment.

Many local authorities, including the two in my constituency, have had to stop providing improvement grants—only grants for the bare necessities are allowed —because of reductions in their HIPs. The Secretary of State's statement means that there is no hope for people who want improvement grants.

I served on the Wakefield council for many years and I know that council house improvements in that area have ceased because of expenditure cuts. About 5,000 houses built immediately after the war have had no improvements made to them. Tenants have demanded that their houses, which are 35 or 40 years old, should be brought up to modern standards. The Secretary of State's statement gives them no hope. In Wakefield, 4,000 old-age pensioners—including 518 over the age of 75—are on the waiting list. They have no hope of being housed.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I understand why my hon. Friend is concentrating on the problems of improving homes, but many people do not have a home at all. During the debate on homeless persons which I initiated on Friday, the Minister for Housing and Construction, in a sympathetic and understanding speech, said:

"It is up to local authorities, first, to discharge their statutory duty and, secondly, to determine their own priorities after we have made our HIP allocations. No one disagrees with the hon. Gentleman when he says that the resources available for housing are a material factor."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 1337-8.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a speech.

Mr. Boyes: No. I have finished. Is not this——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. O'Brien: I agree with some of the points made by my hon. Friend.

The Leeds district council applied for £66 million to cover its housing needs for the coming year. It is to receive only about £28 million, which means that there will be no new starts in the city of Leeds in the next financial year. There is a demand for more investment and we must wonder what will happen under the Housing Defects Act 1984. No one knows what effect the Secretary of State's statement will have on that Act. I hope that the Minister for Housing and Construction will give us some information on that.

Will the Minister also explain what will happen to capital receipts from land? Will there be no interference with those receipts? Will that money be available to local authorities or will it come under the whiplash of the attack on freedom and democratic procedures in local government?

6.15 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): A few facts: capital allocations this year, on the same basis as last year, after London Regional Transport has been stripped out, go down from £4,200 million to £4,000 million—not a great difference. Education, despite falling rolls, will have the same level of expenditure allocated. Transport and roads will have an increased level of expenditure. Personal social services will come back a bit, but only to reflect the actual level of expenditure on those services.

There are only two significant changes. One is that the Government have devised a strategy for keeping within limits that have been agreed, but not met in the past, and the other is that local authority expenditure on housing will be reduced against last year by about £200 million.

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marlow: No. There is no time.

Local authority expenditure on housing divides, as everyone knows, between an authority's expenditure on its own resources and expenditure on grants. The House was moist yesterday with the weeping of the Opposition over grants. Hon. Members would hardly think that in the last year of the Labour Government housing grants amounted to less than £100 million, whereas in the last full year of this Government they were £700 million.

After the orchestrated cacophony of misinformation from the Opposition Front Bench yesterday, many people would not have realised that those without basic amenities in their houses are still entitled to statutory grants. Mandatory awards remain mandatory.

To the extent that discretionary grants are being reduced, if the Opposition are concerned to provide cash for the middle classes to carry out improvements to their homes—which they would probably have carried out on their own account anyway—with the taxes of the lower paid, we shall be interested to hear that in the winding up speech from the Opposition Front Bench.

I must say to my hon. Friends that all that is happening is that cuts will be made in local authority housing programmes—the building of council houses. I do not know about my hon. Friends, but I believe that we were not sent here massively to increase the number of council houses. We are here to increase private housing. If my hon. Friends are concerned about it, let them go to other countries in Europe where there are fewer council houses and more private sector rented accommodation. Are the slums worse there? Is homelessness worse there? Is the standard of housing worse there? Do we want more council houses or do we want more private accommodation?

Look at the record of local authority housing. Look at the massive mismanagement that has taken place in some areas. Who built the tower blocks that are causing us problems now—the private sector or the public sector? Who uprooted communities and built slums in their place—the private sector or the public sector?

Let us have a quick glimpse at some of the more infamous Left-wing local authorities and see how they have dealt with their housing assets and with the people who live in their council houses. For example, 105,000 local authority homes are currently vacant. In Hackney, one council house in 14 is empty; In Liverpool, 6,500 are vacant. In the Socialist republics, vacancy rates—wastage—are three times the national average and three times as high as they need to be.

Shirts were torn on the Opposition side on behalf of the homeless yesterday. Hypocrisy! The Floor was overflowing with Socialist crocodile tears about homelessness. Why is it that Labour authorities predominate on the list of housing shame? Why are there between 700,000 and 1 million houses vacant at the moment? Is it not because they have been blighted from use by Socialist threats of retribution against the private sector? Why are Labour Members holding the sword of Damocles over the shorthold provisions which would otherwise provide housing for many of the homeless?

Time is short, so I have just one plea to make to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Some houses have been transferred from the public sector for privatisation and improvement. Privatisation is so successful in many areas of the economy—let us get hold of some of these little Moscows and pass them on to people who know how to manage them. Let us privatise more houses and cut the public cost of housing.

6.20 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): As the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has illustrated, the debate has been both contentious and lively. Indeed, it has been a Back Benchers' debate. The pity of it is that many hon. Members sought to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, but were prevented from speaking by the pressures of time.

In his opening speech, the Secretary of State undoubtedly nailed his colours of Thatcherism to the mast. But I believe that many hon. Members on both sides of the House rejected that academic defence. Many of us thought that we saw the very bankruptcy of the Government's policy throughout his speech, just as we saw it yesterday when he delivered his statement. The response of hon.

[Mr. Barry Jones]

Members on both sides of the House demonstrated that. After a searching examination by hon. Members from all parties, there was precious little support for the principles that the right hon. Gentleman had attempted to expound from the House.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech was replete with many revealing phrases, such as "public expenditure plans", "the overspend", "the contingency reserve", "the PSBR", "the cash limit" and "public sector resources". It was the dry as dust, unfeeling, intellectual approach of the Treasury Minister in exile. But we would say that housing is about people, and that is what was missing from the right hon. Gentleman's speech. Indeed, it was a speech made with the Chancellor of the Exchequer at his side, looking for all the world like a veritable minder. Many of us, particularly in the Opposition, believe that yesterday's statements, which have scandalised opinion within and without the House, were effectively constructed inside the Treasury. Indeed, housing Ministers seem to be the prisoners of the Treasury.

From the point of view of statecraft and of good, just government, the state and the Government should not pass up the chance to create good housing. The aim should surely be to lessen the divide between the haves and the have nots, and between those in good and those in wretched housing. If Cabinet Ministers will not tackle the rotten housing in our great cities, but instead seek to strangle the efforts of housing authorities to enhance the lives of the underprivileged, the badly housed and the unwaged, they are accomplices to the storing up of immense social and economic problems for future Governments.

I shall briefly outline some of the problems that we face in Wales. They are desperate problems, which it will take a long time to put right, even if we were in the ideal situation of having all the resources that we asked for. The Welsh housing problem is both unique and extremely worrying. It is worrying not only to those forced to live in conditions of increasing squalor but also to the various sectors of the Welsh housing industry which view the next 20 years with profound trepidation. They believe—as I do — that unless a properly planned, long-term programme of housing investment is launched very soon, we shall need to undertake massive slum clearance schemes by the end of the century.

The problem is as simple as it is serious. We have a vast stock—much larger than the average—of older houses that are now in need of urgent repair. About 39 per cent. of our total housing stock was built before 1919, compared with a figure of 29 per cent. for Britain as a whole. Indeed, 9 per cent. of Welsh homes are described as chronically unfit and another 18 per cent. need immediate renovation work. Thus we say that the Government have failed to tackle the housing crisis effectively.

I beg the Government to reconsider their inflexible approach. We have major human, social and economic problems in our valleys and in the great seaboard of towns of Swansea, Cardiff and Newport. In our valleys, one in five men are jobless. In south-east Wales health problems abound and are well above the average. As hon. Members will concede, the environment is frequently most unsatisfactory—to put it mildly. Our transport facilities are poor. In effect, the debate must be about the quality of life of those who live in the valleys of south-east Wales.

We say that it is unjust of the Government to deny those communities the prospect of a better life. Good housing is needed for that better life but it is not promised by the Government's promises as enunciated today. Housing allocations, and allocations for all other services, have in Wales taken a reduction in real terms of more than £60 million. The Welsh districts now claim an effective reduction of nearly one third in capital housing expenditure over the past two years. The reduced prescribed proportions of housing capital receipts and of other capital receipts have reduced those districts' spending power next year by £50 million at a stroke.

I say to the Secretary of State for Wales that a veritable mountain of sales receipts is staring him in the face. He should use it. He should not forget that, under his regime, a housing crisis of mammoth proportions has arisen. That crisis has paralleled a mass unemployment crisis, to which he has also contributed. We say that he has neglected the social and economic needs of the Welsh people as much as he has attacked and restricted the freedoms of local government.

Despite the Secretary of State's claims, at current rates of allowance for capital expenditure, it is estimated that it will take 40 years to improve the housing stock of the Cynon valley. That is an example of how the right hon. Gentleman has starved housing in Wales. I say to Conservative Back Benchers that Ministers clearly have not moved an inch from yesterday's much-condemned statements. Conservative Members have no doubt listened hard to find reasons for supporting the Government tonight, but if they objected yesterday to the Government's policy, they will surely object to it tonight. They should remember the many homeless, the unemployed building and construction workers, the many tenants, and particularly — perhaps from their point of view — the hard-hit owner-occupiers, who should be given grounds for hope.

For those reasons, I ask hon. Members to support us in the Lobby.

6.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): We are being asked to adjourn the House and lose the business. I can confirm to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) that there will be an opportunity in the new year to vote on the orders relating to these capital expenditure matters.

Three main points of view have been represented in the debate. There is the point of view of those on the Opposition Benches who do not believe in control of public expenditure and whose own reckless pursuit of that principle led them to the IMF and the largest cutback in capital spending that Britain has ever seen. For the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to talk about stop-go policies against that background was a pretty good impertinence.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: We heard a great deal——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: I am going to reply to the debate.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we shall not have a repetition of what happened earlier this afternoon.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones)——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside and others complained about the condition of the housing stock, but——

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you rule whether it is in order for a Minister, replying to a debate, to mention any Front Bench spokesman and not give way to that hon. Member?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We had all this earlier this afternoon. The House well knows the convention. If the Secretary of State or any other hon. Member does not give way that is entirely a matter for him.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside and others complained about the condition of the housing stock. But we know that Labour councils have created some of the worst housing slums. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Hubbard-Miles) reminded us that they had done nothing to improve their housing stock. The Government have made a concerted and determined effort to improve that stock. The latest example of that is the scheme for priority estates, which have such importance in some of our inner cities. The Opposition demand an unlimited right to spend accumulated receipts, yet they fought tooth and nail to prevent the sales that produced those receipts.

The second point of view in the debate is that of those of my hon. Friends who believe that Government policies to control spending should be relaxed, at least to the extent of increasing capital expenditure. But even they recognise that the totality of expenditure must be controlled and preferably matched by the control or reduction of current spending. The CBI was called in aid yesterday to support capital spending. It has specifically drawn attention to the need to cut current spending in order to make that possible.

The third point of view that has emerged from the debate is provided by those who, like my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe, believe that the Government's strategy of tight control of public spending on which we were elected is vital if we are to keep interest rates and taxes down and stimulate the industrial investment that alone will create the additional social resources that we all want. Some of them believe profoundly in that strategy but are understandably concerned, perhaps because we have not explained clearly enough, about why the overhang of housing receipts threatens that strategy. Others perhaps recognise that threat but are concerned about our relationship with local government

I want to deal with those understandable concerns, but I must first make it clear that what we did yesterday when we made the statements was not introduce a new policy; nor introduce a new round of cuts. We are concerned to deliver the plans that we announced to the House in the public expenditure White Paper which the House subsequently approved by the vote on 6 December. I shall return in a moment to the inherent threat to our public expenditure plans.

First, I want to say a word about one thing on which there is probably agreement on both sides of the House. It was raised in the debate by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Hexham who spoke of the inadequacies, under successive Governments, of the long-term arrangements for capital planning by local authorities. It is undoubtedly true. We have had underspend under both Labour and Conservative Governments. We were reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend that in an earlier age the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) urged us to spend, spend, spend, and break the bank. He did, and the Labour party called in the IMF and had a full-scale moratorium.

We had our own problem of underspend in the early 1980s and then we urged local authorities to spend. When they did it was on a scale that threatened our public expenditure control programme. It is because of those inadequacies——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: I want to deal in detail with the point.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: It was because of those inadequacies——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: —that, in the summer, I launched consultations with Welsh local authorities and my right hon. Friend is launching parallel discussions with local government. That is why I announced yesterday that we have begun to move towards a system that gives greater stability and assurance, flexibility around the cash limit, enables us to carry forward a reasonable level of underspend, and accepts that a comparable level of overspend should not lead to mid-term intervention or moratorium. That, combined with increasingly firm forward indications, will enable local authorities to plan better for the future.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: Some hon. Members have implied that local authorities have been prevented from making use of the assets that have been released from the sale of houses. But over the past three years a large proportion of new housing receipts were built into the housing allocations in order to encourage local authorities to use them, and, in addition, the authorities were free to use the prescribed proportions. If, in practice, those built-in receipts had been used simply to finance house building instead of, for example, for reducing debt, we might not have the threat to the cash limit that we now have. The fact is that up-to-date housing allocations have carried 100 per cent. borrowing approval and the availability of that has enabled local authorities to accumulate receipts on a massive scale. Those receipts provide a large potential overspend on the cash limit, and, indeed, enabled local authorities in effect to spend their resources twice over.

The potential overspend amounts to hundreds of millions of pounds and it comes on top of a current expenditure overspend. All the receipts have flooded in over two or three years and all that the Government are urging is that local authorities should spend that expenditure over a somewhat longer period——

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: —and not to spend it all at once.

[Mr. Edwards]

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving), in an intervention, said that authorities were not being allowed to spend their receipts. They are being spent. They are being used to enhance spending over the net amounts that we could otherwise afford. They are making an important contribution to the spending power that is available.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) suggested that we had cut back sharply in Wales the spending plans over the next three years compared with the previous six years. The hon. Gentleman got his maths wrong. He calculated it on five years when the comparison was with six years.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose*——

Mr. Barry Jones *rose*——

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: I wish to answer the points raised in the debate. I hope that hon. Gentlemen will forgive me——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Barry Jones.

Mr. Jones: Why does the right hon. Gentleman not tell the House that, as a Housing Minister, he has the worst record of any Welsh Office Minister? Is it not a fact that last year his starts record was a pathetic 1,500 houses?

Mr. Edwards: It is characteristic of the hon. Gentleman to believe that the only contribution to housing should come from the local authority sector. He has not referred to the massive increase in investment that is going on in the private sector.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is little time left. The House wishes to hear what the Secretary of State has to say.

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman also forgets the Government's massive increase in expenditure on housing improvements that the Labour Government totally neglected.

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: The Labour Government spent £90 million a year. We spent — *[Interruption.]* The hypocrisy of the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is nearly the Christmas holidays. Can we proceed in peace?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is behaving like a Christmas clown. I remind my hon. Friends, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe did, that our success in keeping the overall control of public spending is the major element in the rising industrial investment that is taking place. Interest rates are lower than they would otherwise be, despite the pressures on sterling, the effect of a strong dollar, the mining strike and movements in oil prices.

Private sector building is especially sensitive to movements in interest rates. Manufacturing industry is investing now because it has confidence in our policies. In sharp contrast to the humiliation suffered by the Labour Chancellor and Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is setting out to two major international meetings with the confidence of investment, the markets and other world leaders behind her. They know that the Government mean what they say when they set about a policy, and that they will maintain it. The House by its vote will wish to maintain that confidence.

Question put, That this House do now adjourn:—

The House divided: Ayes 225, Noes 325.

Division No. 58] **[8.43 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dover, Den
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeman, Roger
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Fraud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McCusker, Harold
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'de E)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sean Hughes and
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ames, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Straf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James A.
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John

Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Normanton, Tom
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang.

Question accordingly negatived.

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House at its rising on Friday 21 December do adjourn till Wednesday 9 January.—*[Mr. Major.]*

6.59 pm

Mr. John Silkin (Lewisham, Deptford): Most hon. Members will think that this Christmas recess is deserved and, indeed, overdue. Their complaint might be that the period of the recess is too short rather than too long. With great respect to those hon. Members who may believe that they have national or international points to raise, in an extremity the House can always be recalled. What cannot be done, however, is to give a feeling of necessity to the vital interests of our constituents.

I have such a constituent, who is liable to be deported immediately after Christmas. I must pay a qualified tribute to the Minister of State, Home Office, and I have given him notice that I was going to try to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, in this debate. I asked him on 30 November to delay deporting the lady at least until after Christmas, so that she can spend Christmas with her family. This he has done, but the fact remains that he notified me and her only yesterday. One can imagine the agony through which she and her family have gone during the period until yesterday, and through which they will go between now and her almost certain date of deportation early in the New year.

The facts of the case are alarming, and I do not believe that they will be contested by anyone. The lady's name is Ayse Halil and she has three children. The first is a boy, Sebah, who is aged 11 and is a British citizen. He was born in England and has always lived here. The second boy, Sarhan, is aged seven and is also a British citizen. The third, a girl, was born in Cyprus three years ago. The two elder children attend the local primary school, Myatt Garden school, where they are so popular that it is not difficult on any day to gather together many children and parents to see what can be done to help the lady who is being deported. That is a reflection of the popularity of the children and of the family in the locality.

Here we come to an interesting point. The grandparents have lived in Britain since 1971, and Ayse's father served with the British Army for 25 years before that time. He came here as a British citizen in 1971, and his son—Ayse's brother—is also a British citizen who lives here. If Ayse is deported, her elder son, who has lived here all his life, will either have to be left behind or must accompany his mother to the Turkish part of Cyprus, where he must speak a language that he does not understand—none of the children speaks Turkish—and must remain in what is effectively a foreign country for as long as it may be his fate to live there.

I do not contest the Minister's suggestion — the mother does—that she entered Britain by deception. I say only that she did so in 1971, when the rest of the family was already here. Had the parents known what to do, their daughter as well as their son would have had British nationality. But her father, who served for so long in the British Army, did not know what to do, so she did not acquire British nationality. She came here in 1971, she was regarded as an illegal immigrant and after a considerable period she was deported.

However, she returned again because her two older children were here. She is a very dutiful daughter and

sister and a loving mother. She came back to be with her whole family. The extended family of grandparents, parents and children is typical of the way in which she grew up, and it sometimes still exists in the villages of our country. It was not unnatural that she should return, particularly as her relationship with her husband had undergone a difficult phase, and she is now pursuing an action for divorce.

The Minister, in such circumstances, can do one of two things. First, he can exercise compassion; I give him credit for some compassion because he has at least allowed her to stay until Christmas. Secondly, he can say that she was wrong in offending against the rules and that therefore she must go, regardless of what may happen to the family, her parents, her brother, herself or her children.

The Minister is basically a compassionate man, but one of the principal ingredients of compassion is not just sympathy with somebody in distress, but imagination. It is the ability to override bureaucracy, which will always, in my experience, tell one why one cannot do something. The Minister can tell the bureaucracy that it has to do something. Here is a family that has settled well into the community and is popular, and which consists of three generations. I believe that somebody who served in the British Army for four or five years is worthy of some support, and somebody who served for 25 years is entitled to even more support by that length of service. However, the Minister does not hold that view.

The Minister makes his point on the issue of the deception—I do not know whether there was one, but if there was, it was understandable. He does not view the matter from a human angle but from a bureaucratic angle. When I pointed out something that his predecessor had said in the debate on the British Nationality Act, the Minister chose to dispute it with me, so it is worth while repeating what was said then. The hon. Gentleman's predecessor said that any child who had been here for 10 years should be regarded as entitled to remain here, whatever the status of the parents. He said:

"We have chosen the tenth birthday as the cut-off point because we would not wish to insist on the deportation of a child born here who had lived here for 10 years. If his parents are here subject to conditions of stay or in breach of the immigration control at the time of birth, 10 years seems to the Government to be a long enough period in which to expect those problems to have been resolved.

Furthermore, the first 10 years of a child's life clearly are the formative years. By the age of 10, we believe, the child's roots could be regarded as being firmly set in this country." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 26 November 1981; c. 221.]

There could not be a clearer picture of the oldest child, who is 11.

When I put these various points to the Minister he replied in a long detailed letter. He said:

"Turning now to your specific points, you have suggested Mrs. Halil and her family have a long association with this country. But this is not so. Her father and her paternal grandfather were, like Mrs. Halil herself, born in Cyprus."

I am a little older than the Minister of State, and I can remember that Cyprus has a rather long association with the British Crown, which started in 1878 when Benjamin Disraeli brought back from Berlin peace with honour, and also Cyprus. As a result of that association, a number of people on that island joined the British Army, and I made that point to the Minister. It would seem to me that 25 years is quite a long association, but the Minister is entitled to take a different view.

The letter continues:

"Although her parents were registered as citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies when she was still a child"—

that is worth noting, as well—

"they continued to live in Cyprus for many years indeed, until after Mrs. Halil had grown up and married, and they never sought registration for their children."

I repeat that they did not even know that it was necessary, and why should they? The letter continues:

"Mrs. Halil had not contemplated accompanying her parents when they emigrated, and as on marriage she had ceased to be a dependent daughter, she could not in any case have come with them to this country for settlement."

What was the major crime that this woman committed against the British law, constitution and everything else? It is that her parents did not register her as a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies. What a terrible mistake she made when she was about nine or 10. I understand that the Minister of State would wish to punish her for that for the rest of her life.

One of the essential agreements of compassion is imagination. We are dealing with a family which does not speak a word of Turkish, which is useful—the father is well employed — is liked in the community and has settled down well. If the Minister of State gets his way, what will happen? The family will go to Cyprus. The children will be homeless. They will be separated from the rest of the family—from their uncle whom they look on as a second father, and their grandparents—and from their school friends. The Minister of State is condemning them to that.

I leave the House with one last gem in the letter of 6 February 1984 written to me be the Minister of State. It deserves to be put on the desk of every civil servant in Britain. I pointed out that the lady was being divorced and that I was worried about the children's fate. The Minister replied:

"I am not satisfied that her circumstances in Cyprus would be markedly worse than those of any other divorcee with young children."

Cyprus is, however, a foreign land, which is partitioned and speaks a language that the children cannot understand, and the children will be taken from the rest of their family.

7.11 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I do not believe that the House should adjourn for the Christmas recess without an extensive debate on a subject that is exercising a large number of minds—the BBC licence fee. Although I know that this subject will be debated in another measure——

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Much later.

Sir Dudley Smith: —much later, as my hon. Friend says—it is important that there should be contributions to this discussion.

There is no popular recognition of the need for a substantial increase in the television licence fee. Many people regard it as wrong that, to obtain a television set, one must pay a fee, whether or not one watches BBC programmes. Some people watch the opposition channels far more frequently. I am sure that all hon. Members are worried about the fact that although £60-odd for a licence fee does not matter much to an affluent person, many people on fixed incomes — pensioners and the unemployed—who will not receive any assistance in this respect, will find that amount a severe imposition.

[Sir Dudley Smith]

Over the years, the BBC has made a tremendous contribution in establishing radio and television, but it is not without its faults, some of which have grown up recently. Stories of a prince's ransom paid to some disc jockeys do not go down well, nor do accounts of junkets abroad for executives or stories of a not especially senior official stationed in north America who, if the press is to be believed, has been jetting backwards and forwards on Concorde. Those stories would certainly not go down well with two or three multinationals which, as a mark of stringency, impressed upon their directors and senior executives the fact that they must travel club class, rather than first class, when they travel backwards and forwards across the Atlantic. Even today, there is a newspaper story about a well-known television presenter on breakfast television who is, allegedly, offered the kind of money that one would expect an international footballer to receive. I am not saying that these are vast amounts of money compared with the totality of BBC finances, but it is indicative of an attitude that needs to be changed when dealing with public money.

The BBC should stick to those aspects of television in which it excels. The BBC excels in a number of respects. The BBC pioneered the advance of television, but it has, however, gone into other areas that need to be curbed in view of the request for financial stringency. By and large, breakfast television is a waste. Local radio is often a disaster. This is a highly competitive area, and time and again one learns that BBC local radio is well eclipsed by the commercial opposition.

I believe—this might not go down well with the Opposition—that the BBC might have more friends among Conservative Members and Conservatives outside the House if it were a little less biased. In many instances, it is fairly easy to detect that the BBC is left of centre. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition may scoff, but, to ascertain the reaction, they should ask the public. Commentators, analysts and presenters with a bias can be clearly perceived to be in the majority, and that is worrying in a democracy in which the BBC is the national broadcasting institution.

I am not suggesting that there is any conspiracy against the Government or the Conservative party. I am suggesting, however, that for years the corporation, perhaps innocently, has been attracting many more people from the Left than is healthy—be they producers, executives or presenters. I am talking not merely about current affairs; it spans the whole spectrum of programmes, including drama.

Above all else, the BBC should be seen to be neutral and even-handed, and most people would expect that of the BBC. The BBC must be properly funded. It is unsatisfactory to the corporation and to the public at large that there should be a special form of taxation to raise the revenue to operate the BBC. That system has applied for a long time. It is understandable in view of the way in which the BBC grew up, but I do not believe that it can hold water today. Although some fee element should be retained, there must, in future, be some element of advertising to provide for the corporation's financing needs.

The BBC, which is so good in many ways—technique and achievement—will not compromise itself by a sensible input of advertising. I am sure that the BBC in its heart of hearts will realise that, and most hon. Members—certainly Conservative Members—would subscribe to that view. Sufficient free advertising occurs on the BBC at present. Books and records are plugged, and during all kinds of discussion programmes there is a free dropping of product names. Once upon a time that was totally prohibited. Today there is advertising all the time. Let the BBC come clean and do that properly and sensibly.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House — I know that this is not entirely his responsibility, but he is a man of enormous influence—will consider seriously a strictly limited increase in the licence fee when we return in the new year and that there will be a genuine move towards some type of limited advertising.

7.17 pm

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): Two matters should be debated before we adjourn for the Christmas recess. The first concerns unemployment. Most hon. Members, and certainly Labour Members, have waited for a long time for a statement that the Government will really tackle the scourge of unemployment. I raised this matter last year on the motion for the Adjournment for the Christmas recess. I said then that Conservative Members want the unemployment level to be reduced substantially. But they have not yet persuaded the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to give sufficient attention to this problem and to have a think tank considering the unemployment problem, which is the scourge of our time. We are simply tinkering with the matter and hoping that something will happen.

We need to have a fundamental look at unemployment. We shall have to redefine what we mean by unemployment. It cannot continue to be a lottery. Last Christmas, I related the story of a young woman who said to me that she had a degree. She had been unemployed for only a short time and had managed to secure a reasonable job. When she went to the social security office for the last time to get her P45, tax forms and other papers in order, the young men and women she had met during the few months that she was unemployed congratulated her enthusiastically and wished her well. They said, "You have a job, and we haven't but we shall remember you with great fondness." The young woman told me that the sad thing was that many of the young men and women, who were as qualified as she was, had not been lucky enough to secure a job. In other words, obtaining a job is a lottery. Some people can obtain jobs, but many suitably qualified people cannot. That is a scandal and a shame.

Whether we accept the massaged figures of about 3·5 million people at present unemployed, or the probably truer figure of 4 million if one includes the number of people who do not bother to register because there is no job available, it is a scandal of the first order that we have not given all our time and attention towards tackling the problem.

The massaged figure of 3·5 million people unemployed is being increased at the rate of about 20,000 a month. The optimistic view is that unemployment will remain at that level; the pessimistic view is that the figure might double or be half as much again and add about a further 375,000 to the number of unemployed. We do not seem to be doing anything about it apart from tinkering a little with job

creation. Some attention should have been paid to this problem. The Cabinet should have given its powerful attention to solving the problem.

Other countries are dealing with the problem. West Germany is tackling the problem, and we must. The social fabric of this nation cannot endure if we continue to add to the already far too high total of unemployed. I shudder to think what will happen if we increase the unemployment figure by a further 200,000, 250,000, 350,000 or 400,000 year by year. The Government must make a statement to show that they recognise the scope of the problem and that they are going to do something about it.

The second subject about which I wish to talk is that of people being persuaded to take out guarantee insurance when they buy television sets. They are called extended guarantees and they are for consumer goods—television sets, refrigerators, deep freezes, washers, driers and other such commodities. Many people are persuaded by slick salesmanship and, we must recognise, by the attraction of the security obtained from paying an insurance premium of £30 or £40. They then believe that the television, or whatever, is guaranteed and that maintenance will be free if it needs repairing. They may have to pay a bob or two for one or two small things, but they have a virtual trouble-free guarantee for about five or seven years.

The problem is that many of those guarantees have turned out to be bogus and worthless. It is calculated that 800,000 people have taken out such guarantees. The companies have made rich pickings. When the people have called upon the insurance company they have found that it has gone bust. If one calculates that the companies have to pay some commission to the agents promoting the insurance, if the companies finish up with only half of what the 800,000 people have paid, they will make a great deal of money.

I believe that we are to have an insolvency Bill in the new year. There was an article in one of the Sunday newspapers about it, and those who have considered the matter do not think the Bill will deal with the problem that I have described.

Christmas is probably one of the most important times of the year for selling extended guarantee insurance. Most hon. Members will agree that it is the time when most people buy such goods and seek insurance. We have not had a statement from the Government about the matter. The Minister has been rather dismissive. I infer from what he said that people are expected to be more prudent when buying that kind of insurance. We have a duty as Members of Parliament to protect people. They are not imprudent. They have been sold bogus and worthless policies. I am not saying that the people who sell them know that, but when the customers call upon the companies to deliver what they are insured against, they find out that the companies are no longer in business. We have a duty to protect such people.

Those are the two matters to which I think we should have an answer before we adjourn for the Christmas recess.

7.27 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I am sure that no one in his right senses believes that we should rise later than Friday, so the points that are being made in the debate are for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to contemplate during the recess. I wish to raise a number of points briefly which my right hon. Friend may wish to brood upon before he replies.

The first is about disarmament. As my right hon. Friend knows, some extremely important talks have been taking place in this country between the Prime Minister and Mr. Gorbachev over the past few days. The Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko, is to meet Mr. Shultz and other such meetings will undoubtedly take place. I hope that the coming year will see a substantial commitment by the leaders of the West and the East to getting some agreement signed during the course of 1985.

For example, I cannot understand why it should not be possible to reach an agreement on chemical warfare. No one can favour the continuance of chemical warfare or the weapons to sustain it. The negotiations on that matter, which have been dragging on for so long, should be able to be brought to a conclusion.

Secondly, if both sides give sufficient impetus, it should be possible to bring to a more successful conclusion the negotiations on balanced force reductions that have been going on in Vienna for over 10 years and which have made no progress. I also hope that the Americans and the Russians will address themselves seriously in the new negotiations that are to take place, to the proposals that President Reagan made over a year ago about what he called "build down"—reducing the numbers of strategic weapons which exist.

I defer to no one in my belief in a strong defence policy, but I firmly believe that there are too many missiles in the world. It is possible to have a safe world and a safe balance if we proceed in the way that the President suggested with a mutual build down of the number of missiles. I hope that the Government will place the full weight of their diplomacy behind constructive talks to reach agreements during 1985.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McGuire) mentioned unemployment. We have been reading a good deal in the newspapers recently about the fact that the Government are contemplating new initiatives on unemployment. They may be reflected in the Budget, but we must wait and see.

I hope that it will be understood by Ministers that many hon. Members on both sides of the House regard the reduction of unemployment as a matter which should be at the top of the Government's list of priorities. We are looking for initiatives from Ministers—not just throwing money at the problem—which will deal with this great social evil. I hope that nothing will be ruled out of serious consideration in advance. During the past few months there has been an investigation into various forms of social security. If there has not been an investigation into reducing the pension age of men, there should be one. That would have a substantial effect on the unemployment problem. It is a policy which has great public support, and it should be examined much more urgently.

I remember raising that matter with the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) when he was Minister for Social Security in the previous Labour Government. Ministers in both Governments have said that the policy is too expensive. Unemployment is costing the country more and more and we cannot afford to ignore such initiatives. I hope that the reduction of the pension age for men will be considered seriously by Ministers between now and the Budget, along with an expansion of the job release scheme.

[Mr. Michael Latham]

I received a letter this morning from a constituent which stated that about 84,000 are in receipt of the job release allowance, which is undoubtedly a worthwhile contribution. However, I hope that the scheme will be expanded. The unfortunate decision was taken some time ago to raise the qualifying age to 64 years and we should be looking to reducing it to the previous qualifying age of 62 years.

I hope that between now and Parliament meeting again on 9 January there will be a serious consultation on the limited list of drugs. I believe that every hon. Member has been disgusted by the circular which has been put out by Roche Products Ltd.

Sir Paul Hawkins (Norfolk, South-West): Absolutely scandalous.

Mr. Latham: Indeed. That circular has done great harm, undoubtedly, to the constructive points which have been made by general practitioners, which have been taken seriously by all hon. Members. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to assure me that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health is starting from the basic proposition that patients must be able to have the drugs they need, and if two drugs are the same, it obviously makes sense to choose the cheaper one. I am sure that everyone supports that approach.

However, the present proposals seem to be unduly restrictive, for example, on laxatives, which are especially important to the elderly; they should be considered again. There should be proper consultation between now and 31 January.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is wrong-headed of the British Medical Association apparently to refuse to enter into consultation on this issue?

Mr. Latham: I concur with my hon. Friend's intervention. I have stated that I take that view in letters that I have written to general practitioners in my constituency. It is most regrettable that the BMA has taken such an attitude. I hope that it will reconsider its position as quickly as possible so that the best professional advice is available to Ministers before they make an important decision.

Finally, many of us are concerned about the attitude which seems to come from the Department of Health and Social Security, that rural maternity units are undesirable and should be closed. The Department seems to take the view that mothers-to-be should give birth in large central hospitals. There is no support for such a policy in rural areas. Mothers-to-be attach great importance to, and much enjoy, the support and help that they are given in rural maternity units such as those in Melton Mowbray and Oakham. If the DHSS takes the view that it can get away with closing rural maternity units through regional health authorities or district health authorities so that all facilities can be concentrated in large general hospitals, it must realise that that will be opposed by those representing rural constituencies.

I hope that that will be understood by Ministers. Our constituents are incensed by the "concentration" policy. I have raised this matter previously with Ministers and I must tell my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that I have not been satisfied with their responses. I shall continue to raise the issue until I get satisfaction.

7.33 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): In joining others in resisting the Adjournment of the House, I wish to make a firm protest about the way in which the Government, and especially the Foreign Office, have sought to introduce a fee for issuing entry certificates. I am pleased that the Leader of the House is in his place, as he had to endure three points of order from me on this issue last week. He undertook during business questions on Thursday to consult his colleagues in the Foreign Office to ascertain the procedures that they are proposing to introduce for entry certificate fees. I was therefore concerned to learn yesterday from the Foreign Office that it intended today to lay an order that would seek to introduce a charge of £10 for entry certificates from 1 January. It appears that it intends to use a procedure that is not subject to parliamentary procedure, either that of approval or annulment. It proposes to introduce an order to amend the Consular Fees Act 1980.

Yesterday, there was a meeting of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, which is charged with responsibility for scrutinising such orders. It was therefore denied an opportunity of scrutinising the proposed Foreign Office order. That goes to reinforce the concern that I and others have about the way in which the Foreign Office has proceeded.

It was proposed originally by the Foreign Secretary on 22 November to introduce entry certificate fees and the proposal is to become a fact in the way that I have outlined. Many hon. Members may not consider this to be a matter of great significance, so I remind the House that £10 is about a third of the annual income of a Bangladeshi family living in a rural area in that country. We should be concerned also about the principle lying behind the introduction of such a fee. It diminishes the right conferred by the Immigration Act 1971 on Commonwealth citizens freely to enter the United Kingdom. It may be ultra vires to diminish such a right conferred by statute by means of an order of the sort that I have described. As I have said, the order will seek to amend the Consular Fees Act 1980, which I would argue was never construed, when enacted, as a suitable vehicle for introducing a charge for entry certificates.

The entry clearance procedure, when established, was presented as a means of facilitating entry into the United Kingdom for Commonwealth citizens and others. It was suggested that it would avoid protracted and distressing problems of the sort that are often encountered at ports of entry. These problems are often encountered by those who have entry clearance permission, but that is by the way. There was no suggestion when the procedure was first introduced—and certainly when the debates took place prior to the introduction of the entry clearance procedure — that a fee would be introduced. It was never suggested that the Government considered a fee to be appropriate. It is entirely inappropriate for such a fee to be introduced, and if it is considered to be a precedent, we are no doubt on a fee escalator for entry certificates.

We all remember that nationality fees have been introduced and increased substantially over a short period. Even the Government were embarrassed by the obscene profits that they made from nationality fees. They were

persuaded some time ago to introduce modest reductions in the fees charged. If an entry certificate fee of £10 is introduced, it is likely that a substantial increase will be suggested in the near future.

It is an outrage for the Government to introduce a fee by means of laying an order that will not be subject to parliamentary procedures. They have compounded the outrage by adopting a back-door method to implement it. They have committed a contempt of Parliament in so doing as they have denied those of us with an interest in these matters any opportunity to debate the fee in principle. We shall have no opportunity to question the Executive about the way in which the scheme was proposed.

It is clear that the scheme was cobbled together in a hurry. That was done in desperation when the Foreign Office was beleaguered by criticisms of the inadequacy of our overseas aid budget. With cuts in the British Council's budget and a reduction of the moneys available to the external services, some bright spark, no doubt buried in the Treasury, thought that it would be a good idea to introduce a fee for entry certificates.

I understand that the proposal has been resisted considerably within the Foreign Office, and that is understandable. I hope that considerable second thoughts will be given to the introduction of a fee during the recess. I hope, too, that the proposal will be deferred and that the House will be given an opportunity to debate the introduction of a fee so that we are not presented with a fait accompli.

Several hon. Members mentioned the financing of the BBC. I should like to comment on that issue which, as hon. Members said, will perhaps be debated more extensively at a later hour. I should like to express my concern and that of many of my constituents at the application by the BBC for a £19 increase in the licence for a colour television. It is clear that many pensioners will be unable to pay such an increase, if it is agreed. They might be faced with the prospect of giving up watching television altogether or, like my constituent Mrs. Lilian Swailes, might find themselves in prison. Mrs. Swailes is a widow, a pensioner, who was sentenced to 14 days' imprisonment recently because she could not pay a fine that resulted from her inability to pay her television licence fee. Other pensioners in my constituency have recently made it clear that they are prepared to go to prison because they do not want to pay the reported increase in their television licence fee.

I am sure that this belief is shared by many other hon. Members. I believe that the only way of resolving this matter satisfactorily is for a substantial increase in the pension to be agreed, which would allow pensioners to make choices on what they spend their own money. However, it is unlikely that there will be such a substantial increase in the pension, particularly under this Government. Therefore, the Government's options narrow considerably. They know that this has been a controversial issue for many years. The time has now come for all pensioner households to have free television.

Ministers should understand that television is often the only form of entertainment for pensioners, and often the only company for them. Many are isolated — the removal of bus services, the increase in bus fares and other difficulties have isolated many of them, who now look to that little box in the corner as their only entertainment and company. We should see television more and more as a social service for pensioners. That should be recognised by the Exchequer funding the moneys necessary to enable all pensioner households to enjoy free television.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), who referred to this subject, floated the idea that we could alleviate the problems over the financing of the BBC by the introduction of advertising. That presents a very serious threat. The idea might have superficial attractions for some hon. Members and sections of the public, but I believe that it presents a serious threat to the programme standards of the BBC, and certainly to its accountability. It would expose it even more than at present to commercial pressures. There are considerable doubts about the availability of advertising revenue to be extended to the BBC and, if there were advertising, what would be the impact upon many newspapers, particularly regional newspapers throughout the country?

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): If the hon. Gentleman does not want the licence fee to go up, or if he wants it to go up by a minimum amount, yet does not accept the idea of advertising income for the BBC, how does he propose that the BBC should balance its budget? Does he propose that the Government should subsidise the BBC? If so, it would become an arm of Government. It is s difficult problem. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can give me an answer.

Mr. Madden: It is a difficult problem and has been around for a long time. Government financing of the BBC's overseas services has not created the problems mentioned by many detractors of the idea of Exchequer funding of the BBC. In my view, it should be funded from the Exchequer as essentially a social service, and that could be done for a fraction of the cost of Trident nuclear submarines, for instance, and would do a great deal more good to many more people than increasing the licence fee in substantial dollops, as has been done year by year. If we continue with the licence revenue system, it will become more unwieldy than it is today.

As an hon. Member representing part of Yorkshire, it would be impossible for me to argue that we should not adjourn without mentioning the plight of the unemployed and the extent of unemployment in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and in my constituency, where in parts it reaches 40 per cent., 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. The debate earlier today highlighted the damage that Government policies are doing to the prospects of getting a job for many of my constituents, particularly school leavers, and those who have endured long-term unemployment for two, three and four years.

Those people want the Government to change their policies. They want a change of priorities. They do not want to see available resources being given in tax cuts to the relatively well-off; they want them to be put into public expenditure—into massive house building and construction programmes and improving the infrastructure of our county and our cities. Those are the sort of projects that they want. They do not know how long they will have to wait for changes in policy to come from the Government, but they do know that that is the only solution that they can look to. They hope that the Government will respond quickly to their plight and their needs, which they see so vividly. They know what the remedies are. What they are waiting for is a response from the Government, and they hope that it will come sooner rather than later.

7.47 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I make no apology to the House for raising a problem that is probably exclusive to the county of Cornwall. We require an early indication from the Government in respect of the county's application for a milk quota for the new agricultural college that is to serve the needs of Cornwall and is located in my constituency. I should add that I have had extended correspondence on the issue with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I informed his private office earlier today that I intended raising the matter this evening.

As the House will know, Cornwall is a rural county. The importance of farming to the economy is not in question. Indeed, it is only an accident of history that no farm college was located within the county. The need for a farm education and agricultural training centre in the county for the national certificate in agriculture and, in addition, for training and education for part-time students was identified as an urgent priority in 1983, and was supported by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science.

The county council was offered a lease of the 440-acre Duchy home farm in August 1983, which could be used for agricultural education and training in the county's main agricultural enterprises. Being located in the south-west of the United Kingdom, Cornwall is essentially a livestock-rearing area. We like to think that we grow the best natural grass in the world. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) will not disagree. A herd of 75 cows was established in 1983 on a county council smallholding as an interim measure, to be ready to transfer to the home farm in September 1984. However, in April this year we saw the implementation of milk quotas as a result of the EEC decision.

As no milk was produced on that farm on 2 April 1984, it did not automatically qualify for a quota under the regulations, and it could not be considered as a special case as the rules in that respect are very strictly drawn. Furthermore, the county council is unlikely to succeed in claiming a quota on the basis of exceptional hardship as it would have to establish that farming was its main occupation.

On the other hand, approval has been obtained from the National Certification Council for Agriculture for the one-year agricultural course to begin in September 1985. In practice, it is likely to begin in September 1986, but that does not alter the fact that the uncertainty is causing problems. Day release students are already attending the new agriculture college, and it is hoped eventually to provide residential accommodation for about 40 students who will undertake the basic one-year course.

The total capital outlay by the county council for the project is likely ultimately to be about £750,000. The livestock, new dairy units and other features have already cost about £250,000. At present, young people from Cornwall wishing to undertake a basic, standard one-year course in agriculture have to attend establishments in Devon or Somerset. With the exception of the cost of education, the farm is to be run on a financially self-supporting basis. The lack of a milk quota means that the farm will run the risk of a levy, which could significantly affect its financial viability.

I believe that the hardship caused by the EEC regulations to local authorities, such as Cornwall, which aim to provide an agricultural education provision of their own must be recognised and alleviated. The regulations which introduced milk quotas made no reference to the requirements of agriculture education or farm extension in general. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to give us an assurance that, once the new EEC Commission is established in 1985, the Government will apply to Brussels for our special requirements to be taken into account. I do not criticise either the Commission or the Council of Agriculture Ministers for this omission with regard to agriculture training establishments. Nevertheless, there is a real problem.

It would be ludicrous if, after all these years, we finally achieved a farm college for Cornwall, which is essentially a livestock county, but could not allow students to be trained in milk production and all that is involved in the running of a dairy herd. Dairying is a fundamental part of the farm economy of Cornwall. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has considerable sympathy with our position, which arises from a pure accident of history. I therefore ask my right hon. Friend, with his west country connections and no doubt his deep understanding of our problems, to assure the House that, once the new Commission is established in Brussels, our requirements in Cornwall will be drawn to its attention.

7.55 pm

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Looking forward to 1985, it is not a bad thing also to look back. If we are glad to get away from here for a short break, I am sure that Ministers are equally glad to get away and even more glad to know that we are going away. I hope that if Ministers get anything from Father Christmas in their pillow cases, stockings or whatever, it will be better briefs to use when they get back.

The Government's greatest totem pole of the last Parliament was the money supply. In this Parliament it has become the public sector borrowing requirement. As a matter of fact, I do not go much on totem poles and I think that the Government might do better if they did a few things slightly differently. There is a strange paradox about getting older. One realises that although one is getting older and has less time, in politics there is plenty of time, but Governments seem not to recognise that. I believe that the Government may be in too big a hurry about some things.

Looking back over the five years or so since the Conservatives came to office, one recognises that the Government have done many things which needed to be done following the period of the Labour Government. They got inflation down and productivity up. With the exception of the miners' strike, they achieved a great reduction in the number of strikes and much better order in British industry. Government expenditure has decreased as a proportion of GNP and industry is more competitive.

All those things are splendid, but one or two things are not so good. First, unemployment is much too high. We must be realistic and understand that unemployment is also high in many other countries, but that does not alter the fact that we must reduce it here. Secondly, manufacturing industry has received a buffeting and too much manufacturing industry has gone out of business altogether. Furthermore, the cost of welfare and social

security arising out of unemployment has increased greatly and become an extremely severe imposition on the Treasury and the taxpayer.

I believe that some relaxation of control of the PSBR and some extra expenditure on construction and housing —I voted reluctantly in support of the Government in the previous debate tonight—would be a good thing. I do not want to pelt money at things. I just want a bit more to be made available. I do not believe that that would be catastrophic for the Government or the Treasury. However, I am told by my friends on the Treasury Bench —not least by the Prime Minister in answer to my question the other day—that there will not be any more money. On the contrary, the Government mean to stick to their policies and to the tightness of the PSBR, and not to give the support in the form of public money that I should welcome. They expect—they have said so—that, if the climate is right, British business and commerce will revive the economy, provide jobs and reduce unemployment without Government support.

Let us suppose that, by a strange mischance, I am wrong and the Prime Minister and the Government are right. At the moment, I am not sure that I am not right. However, let us suppose that I am wrong. One ingredient in the Prime Minister's strategy, which is absolutely vital to its success, is confidence about the future in industry and commerce. Confidence is vital if there is to be expansion and investment. Confidence is a very tender plant, and without it there can be no growth.

At the moment, industry and commerce are cautious, tentative and unadventurous. I am in business as well as being a Member of Parliament. I know that business men are thinking, "Things are all right, but we shall not push the boat out because we are not quite sure what will happen in the next year or so." Why is that? There may be several reasons, but one reason, of particular importance, is that we have had five years of turmoil, because there had to be five years of change. We have been working on the bad situation that the Labour Government left us, and trying to turn the state juggernaut round. To turn any juggernaut round in the middle of a motorway may seem to be the quicker option, but the wise and safer course is to take the juggernaut round by the slip roads. The distance is longer, but one will reach one's destination more quickly in the end.

Some of the turmoil of recent years could not have been avoided. As always, some of it arose from outside causes and was not the Government's fault. For example, the Government are in no way to blame for the miners' strike. It is entirely due to the refusal by the NUM and Mr. Scargill to do a deal. However, some of the aggro apparent in our society does stem from Government action. In the coming year, the Government must concentrate on less contentious legislation and try to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Industry and commerce cannot feel confident about their ability to advance in an atmosphere of political aggro, controversial legislation and dissention of various kinds. The Government and the Prime Minister will have to implement more slowly the programme that they believe to be necessary. I, too, believe that some of the Prime Minister's ideas are necessary. We must still continue to reverse some of the preceding trends, as we have been doing during the past five years. However, it is now necessary —indeed, vital—to slow the process down. Some of the Government's ideas should be left to the next Parliament. We need to win the election. The Prime Minister's strategy of depending upon industry and commerce to solve our economic problems and provide jobs cannot be implemented if there is any uncertainty about confidence, or if, as at the moment, confidence is limited. There must be real confidence for the future, and only the Government can create it.

The country depends upon industry and commerce. I believe that the Government could provide a little more help.

But, even with the little more help for which I have asked, it would still be the responsibility of the free enterprise sector to provide success. I plead with the Leader of the House and his colleagues, during the next Session of Parliament, to bring in less contentious legislation and to avoid some of the traumas from which we have suffered during the past week and month. If we are to effect an improvement in the economy, the mood of the country must be got right, and the Government must seek to get it right.

8.5 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Before the House adjourns, I seek assurances from the Leader of the House on two matters. The first is linked to early-day motion 243, which arose out of a trial in which sentence was delivered on Monday. On Monday, both the leading items on the 10 o'clock television news were about serious court cases following serious offences, both of which raise the same issue. The first was the case of Colin Evans who was convicted of offences against children and had been employed by Berkshire county council. The second case concerned the supply of drugs to young people by a Mr. Catherwood while he was employed as a supply teacher—the title is unfortunate—by the Inner London education authority.

My query relates to the work of several Departments of State. I hope that it will be appropriate for me to direct my remarks to the Leader of the House. How can we improve the situation for the parents and guardians of children and young people? It is clear that the present system is failing. Employers do not find out about highly relevant offences committed by employees who may then perpetrate similar offences against young people during the time of their employment.

At some stage Mr. Catherwood applied to ILEA for a job, but I accept that, at the time when he applied, the rule and the practice were different. Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, there is now a duty for a declaration to be made. However, the system is entirely fallible. Those who have most to hide will declare that they have not committed offences. They will conceal their recorded offences from the eyes of the authorities.

We have to respect the privacy of the individual. It should not be a matter of public knowledge that people have committed offences, if the slate has been wiped clean. However, we must find a way of assuring parents, guardians and other responsible people that youngsters are not liable to be looked after by people who may be a grave risk to them. Is there a chance of the House examining this grave issue soon? I accept that we shall not do so this week, but perhaps we might have an opportunity soon after our return.

The first offence involved sexual offences and the murder of a child and the second involved the supply of LSD, cocaine and cannabis, and was committed in the borough that I represent. Such drugs were supplied at a

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time of serious drug risk to young people. We should examine the law to establish how local authorities and other special employers can be guaranteed to know the track record of those whom they employ. In the Berkshire case, it appears that other employees knew about their colleague. While that in some way makes the occurrences far worse, it appears that ILEA did not know about the criminal drugs record of its employee at all. The present law is clearly inadequate if this can happen.

Early-day motion 156 relates to Crown post offices and sub-post offices, although it refers principally to the latter. It states:

"That this House views with concern the Post Office's campaign to close a number of urban sub-post offices; believes that it is becoming clear that the public consultation before closure is a sham; is concerned about the long-term structure of the Post Office network, both urban and rural; and calls upon the Government to allocate time to have this matter debated on the floor of the House in the near future."

In most parts of the country the Post Office is conducting consultations preceding the announcements to close sub and Crown post offices. The early-day motion asks for an opportunity to have a debate on the consultation procedure that the signatories, of whom I am one, regard as a sham.

I shall quote the example of my constituency because it illustrates the point clearly. We have two Crown post offices, both of which the local district postmaster proposes to close. They are the Bermondsey district office on the Old Kent road and the south-east district post office at 329 Borough high street. The post office at Borough high street has considerably more business than most other district or Crown offices in inner south-east London.

The Post Office Users National Council tells me that it cannot get involved in individual cases, so it is not an effective ally of the customer. The district postmaster has a duty to balance considerations of social need, which are widely drawn, commercial considerations and constraints imposed on the Post Office in its present form. The arguments are about priorities within a cash limit imposed by the Government. There is a major failing in the system which many of us do not accept when closures are announced at the same time as there are profit margins such as have been announced this week and when there is an overwhelming public demand from parents with young children, the handicapped and the elderly and from local commercial interests.

Some of the facts that the Post Office supplies about the time taken to be served and the number of counters open are also untrue. I can supply evidence to support that assertion in regard to the two offices that I have mentioned. Yet there is no possibility of any organisation asking the district postmaster to reconsider his decision, even when there might be a change in the area's economic circumstances. There might be an argument based on social need, but there might also be demographic change. The population in north Southwark is increasing after having declined for 10 years. Will the Leader of the House agree that there is a failure in the procedures as there exists no method for challenging decisions to close post offices? I hope that he will accede to my request soon. I am asking for an assurance today that we can debate this soon because there is not long before a final decision will be made. The post offices will be closed and then it will be too late. The House should consider these issues before such decisions are made.

8.14 pm

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): There are several subjects which ought to be debated before we adjourn. One is the televising of the proceedings of this House, which I hope will never come here in Trojan horse fashion from the other place. Another is the awful mess which I fear we might be getting into by giving emergency aid to many countries in Africa which, unfortunately, are often badly governed, as with Ethiopia. The long-term problems of feeding local populations will not just go away as a result of our sending emergency food and supplies. There are grave and difficult problems there. I hope that Britain and the Government do not feel any shame for the failures of Governments in Africa. Our part has been praiseworthy.

I do not apologise for saying that we should not adjourn until we have debated church affairs. I shall concentrate on that subject. I last mentioned the subject briefly on the Adjournment for the summer recess on 29 July 1982 at c. 1247 of the *Official Report*, following the controversy about the Falklands memorial service. Matters since that time have, unfortunately, got much worse. There was, of course, a time when ecclesiastical subjects were frequently debated in this Chamber, as in the 16th and 17th centuries, when most people believed that church and state should be one. I still believe that disestablishment would be a bad thing and damage the essential fabric of this old Christian nation. That is partly why I am so anxious about the state of the Church of England today.

The procedure for appointing bishops was changed a few years ago, so that now the two names which are presented to the Prime Minister are supposed to be widely supported after thorough consultation. The state has always had a say in the appointment of bishops since early Christian times, and rightly so. Whether the calibre of bishops has improved since the new procedure, it is difficult to say. A bishop used to emerge, rather like the leader of the Tory party, without any votes being taken. I believe that the new system needs to be looked at again. A democratic method is not always or necessarily the best method for top appointments in any walk of life.

There is much criticism of the bishops. Some of it, I agree, is unfair. Bishops still enjoy a position of considerable social and political influence in Britain. Some still live in palaces. I am glad that they do. Some still sit in the Lords, and I welcome them there too. However, they are in a position of great difficulty about speaking out on public affairs. If they speak they are accused of meddling in politics and if they do not speak people ask why the bishops are so silent. Nevertheless, bishops should be careful when making pronouncements outside their normal sphere of faith and morals. Furthermore, they cannot unfortunately speak from a position of great strength in their church where congregations are still falling, where clergy are few and diminishing and where, unfortunately, there is considerable discontent among the wives of the clergy.

We are now living in what in many ways is a heathen society, with great evils such as crimes of violence, divorce, rape and cruelty distressingly common. In my view, these are the first matters to which the bishops should turn their attention and on which they should speak

out and be heard regularly. Divorce has now become horrifyingly common, with appalling effects on the family and children. Surely there is hardly a subject in social affairs which is more urgent and critical, yet how often do we hear the bishops speak on this subject?

Their first concern should be their clergy and their flock. Instead, they are often tempted to deal with less immediate problems in people's daily life, such as the atom bomb or the affairs of the Third world. More than ever, the nation needs teaching about our Christian faith and Christian heritage, yet how often do we hear this from the bishops? It is not that I object to their views on political matters, which may be Left-wing or perhaps wishy-washy SDP, but these matters are secondary to the great questions which we must all ask about life and death, redemption and sin, death and resurrection. These are the matters on which ordinary people desperately need guidance—not things like nuclear disarmament.

Sometimes the bishops put themselves in a ridiculous position: as, for example, over the coal strike, where some of them appear to equate the coal board's stand—which with all its terms of pay and redundancy is extremely generous—and that of Mr. Scargill and the miners on the so-called picket lines. The failure of nearly all the bishops to condemn the violence of the strikers, both on the picket lines and against working miners' homes and families, is quite disgraceful.

I shall pass over as quickly as I can the much publicised appointment of the Bishop of Durham. In the good old days, one of his chief responsibilities was to keep out the Scots. Today he seems to be letting all kinds of heresies into his speeches, which trouble and worry the faithful. However clever he may be in an Oxford common room, he should surely be more careful in his public pronouncements. Looking out from his castle towards his glorious cathedral, he should ponder his heavy responsibilities. Many a clergyman would desire to be in that marvellous position.

I am also troubled about some of the activities of the General Synod, and I wish that its proceedings were more often debated here because I believe that many Back Benchers—more than those who are Anglicans—more truly represent the feelings of the man and woman in the pew than does the Synod. The Synod seems to have attracted the activists who do not necessarily represent ordinary church people.

The near destruction of the Book of Common Prayer in the Church of England is dreadful. I prophesied that this would happen when we debated these matters more than a decade ago and when—unfortunately, as I now see it—we approved the new services. Nowadays, one can find a prayer book service only in about one out of 12 parishes. I live half way between my constituency and Westminster, and I have had to scour parishes in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to find a prayer book, Holy Communion or matins. Whenever the subject is mentioned by colleagues, great regret is expressed on all sides that we ever allowed the Church of England to do such a dreadful thing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that three members of the General Synod also sit in the House. I assure him that when this place turns down a proposal from the Synod, the Synod clearly takes notice. he can be reassured that even if we do not manage adequately to represent all the views in this House, this House is near to the thoughts of the Synod more often than the hon. Gentleman might think.

Mr. Stokes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

The General Synod has recently expressed its view on the introduction of women priests into the Church of England. I have no very strong views on that, although I would hesitate to support it. I would certainly counsel caution among my colleagues in the House.

The nation is undergoing a spiritual crisis. There is still a faint film of Christianity over this land, based largely on our past, traditions and character, but I fear that it is growing thinner. The enormous change in sexual morals is upsetting the institution of marriage on which our society depends. The rise in crimes of violence is terrifying. Even the old morality of honesty and fair dealing is dying, and in the City of London scandals have broken out which would have horrified our fathers.

People, particularly young people, are now longing for a lead and guidance. They want some benchmarks for their ordinary life. Discipline and respect are no longer what they were. We used to pride ourselves on the fact that England was a peaceful society. We prayed each week in the Book of Common Prayer that we should be "godly and quietly governed". These are the matters to which the bishops and clergy should turn their attention.

8.28 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): My brief experience in the House has taught me that this debate is always a fascinating occasion, and I particularly wish to single out the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis), with which I totally concurred.

However, the subject I wish to raise concerns a constituent, Mr. Alan Russell, who, with three other Britons, is presently detained in Libya and has been since May this year. For the bulk of this period of more than seven months, the precise accusations against the four men have not been known. During this whole time their families have suffered great distress. The anguish and uncertainty that pervade the lives of those households as Christmas approaches deserve the sympathy and concern of this House, the Government and, indeed, the authorities in Libya.

I pay tribute to the fortitude of Mrs. Carol Russell and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walters, who are also my constituents. Their unswerving determination to do everything in their power to secure the release of Alan Russell has been wholly admirable. I hope that I would have the same courage and strength if I were ever in that unfortunate position.

Mrs. Russell's plight has been made worse by the fact that her husband was employed by a Libyan company, and payment of his salary ceased some time ago. It is unfortunate that in those very exceptional circumstances, which by no means apply to all Britons held abroad, there is no source of Government aid to help families meet the cost of journeys to and from the countries in which their relatives are held. However, far more urgent than any financial consideration is the need to secure the release of Mr. Russell and the other detainees.

Mr. Russell's trial, on charges which carry very severe penalties, opened last week in Libya and was adjourned for one week until tomorrow to allow a longer time for his

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defence to be prepared. We cannot tell what the outcome of that trial will be. I understand that a British representative in Libya will have access to the trial, and that is most welcome. However, whether we can have confidence in the outcome of the trial and whether it will be fairly conducted remains to be seen. I have no doubt that many people in this country and throughout the world will watch that process very closely.

I am particularly glad that the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative, Mr. Terry Waite, is paying a second visit to Libya. I hope that he will be able to bring comfort to the four men, whose morale, understandably, has been at a low level during a long period of uncertainty.

I should like to bring three points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. First, I urge the Government, in the strongest possible terms, to take every action they can to secure the release of Mr. Russell and the other three men. I recognise that throughout the last seven months efforts have been made behind the scenes. Indeed, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for the way in which he has kept in close contact with me and with the families of the detainees. However, a more public effort must now be made by the Government on behalf of those men. Commercial factors and the position and status of Libya within the international community are negotiating cards which could be used. Is it not possible for an envoy to be sent to Libya to seek the release of Mr. Russell and the other three detainees.

Secondly, Colonel Gaddafi can be assured of my belief that the immediate release of the detainees would produce an easing of relations between our two countries. That would be most welcome in Libya.

Thirdly, I wish to send a clear message to Mr. Alan Russell — that, as long as I am his Member of Parliament and free to speak in this House, his plight will not be forgotten, his case will not disappear from the political scene and I shall continue to urge the Government to act.

At Christmas time, when it is the privilege of probably all Members of Parliament and of most people in this country to be at home with their families, I ask the House and the Government to spare a thought for those poor families whose Christmas will be dominated by their separation from a loved one, a separation which, without action being taken by the Government, may last for very much longer than the Christmas recess for which the House will shortly and deservedly adjourn.

8.34 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): May I say to the Leader of the House that I am not opposed to a Christmas recess. I look forward to spending some days with my wife, children and grandchildren. I look forward also to spending some time with my constituents; in particular, the miners who are on strike, and their wives and children.

We are to return here on 9 January. Why should we not return on Monday 7 January and use both Monday and Tuesday to consider the wide-ranging problems of the prolonged miners' dispute? If the House were to spend two days exclusively on this issue, we might find a solution to a problem which is causing great distress to miners and their families. There is also the financial implication that the nation is forced to endure because of the intransigent attitude of the Prime Minister and her protegé, Mr. Ian MacGregor, supported by her somewhat dried-out wet, the Secretary of State for Energy.

The financial implications are not my only concern. The nation will return to normality only when the violence, brutality, bullying and bitterness are brought to an end. There seems to be less chance of a settlement after 10 months than when the strike began. Both sides are losing financially. Internationally, both the miners and the nation suffer. Surely this Chamber can resolve the differences. It is for that reason that I am pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appeal to everybody—to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, other Ministers and Back Benchers—not to allow this dispute to continue. When one assembles and catalogues all the speeches that have been made and the questions that have been asked and answered since last March, one can only conclude that enough is enough and that the negotiations must begin again. Why not 7 and 8 January 1985?

Let me examine some of the reasons for the deadlock. The main contentious issue is the interpretation of what constitutes an economic pit. I have just read a document which was prepared by Andrew Glyn, fellow and tutor in economics at Corpus Christi college, Oxford, and an associate member of the Oxford university institute of economics and statistics. The document gives chapter and verse as to why the economic case put forward by the National Coal Board is totally false. Although the report was prepared by Andrew Glyn exclusively for the national Union of Mineworkers, the figures—the statistics and evidence presented — confirm the statement by Philip Bassett on 28 November in the *Financial Times*. It is undoubtedly sufficient to confirm the reasons for the refusal by the NUM to accept pit closures on grounds other than exhaustion or geology.

In my constituency, Wyndham Western colliery, which was closed on 7 January, employed 550 miners. It was the last pit in the Ogmore valley. Male unemployment in the Ogmore valley is now 24 per cent. There is very little prospect of further employment for the 550 miners who were pushed out of work. I wonder whether the evidence presented by the NCB's accountants on the economics of the Wyndham Western colliery was the reason for its closure.

Philip Bassett, on 28 November, in his *Financial Times* article—it is not often that we pray in aid that paper—says that six academic accountants carried out a study which enraged the NCB regarding the case for pit closures:

"The study was led by Mr. David Cooper, Price Waterhouse professor of accounting and finance at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and included senior accountancy academics from Sheffield and Manchester universities and the Manchester Business School."

The *Financial Times* article stated that the report by the academic accountants said that careful scrutiny of the underlying accounting reports that identify pit profit and loss

"produces the conclusion that they fail to form an adequate basis for informed management decisions".

The article states:

"The authors give the specific example of the cost of coal at the Cortonwood pit in South Yorkshire—the proposed closure of which was one of the sparks which led to the present strikes.

They say that NCB figures show that in 1981-82, the pit lost £6·20 per tonne. But they suggest that if the fixed cost element then was approximately the same proportion of total costs as in 1984, then 23·1 per cent. of the unit cost of £50·5m would not

be avoided by the decision to close the pit — so that in 1981-82, Cortonwood would have contributed £5·50 profit per tonne to the NCB.

While not claiming this example to be definitive, they say it does indicate the difficulty of public debate on economic closures."

I should like to go into graphic detail about the document on the economic case against pit closures, but I will not delay the House. However, it is important for me to spell out what some of the sections include, so that if the House decides to have a one-day or two-day debate on the dispute, these matters can be resolved amicably. The 10 sections of the report demonstrate the difficulty of deciding what is an economic pit and what is an uneconomic pit. It considers the impact on the economy of lost coal production, the reduced production of mining investment in goods, reduced rail services, extra electricity costs and the reduced consumption of United Kingdom goods by miners' families, as well as losses to the miners, their families and children. In areas such as mine, there is also a loss to the whole community.

The document includes tables on the cumulative costs of closures in certain areas. It mentions the St. Johns colliery in Maestag and the Garw colliery in the Ogmore valley. Mention is also made of the Cwm Coedely colliery. Emlyn Williams and Terry Thomas of the south Wales NUM have told me that the NCB has repeatedly claimed that two of those three pits are uneconomic and should be closed. The board bases its arguments on its own accountancy assumptions, which need to be fully analysed before the NUM can consider further consultation on pit closures.

I toured my constituency last weekend and I know that the miners in Wales will not be forced, cajoled or starved back to work. Their wives back them and will ensure that the men do not go back if there is still a threat of colliery closures. The miners and their wives know that if the men go back and the axe falls on collieries in their small communities, there will be no alternative employment available.

As I said, we have 24 per cent. male unemployment in my constituency. If the St. Johns colliery, which employs 824 miners, is closed, unemployment in that community will escalate to 45 per cent.

The Observer on Sunday carried an article headed "No surrender in the valleys." That article mentioned the Ridley report, which was leaked to *The Economist*, and said that many miners carried grubby photocopies of the report in *The Economist* in their pockets. That report was the Tory party study, drawn up in 1978, which mapped out the policy to dismantle the nationalised industries. It mentioned the "political threat" from the "enemies" of the next Tory Government.

The Observer report said:

"The battleground should be chosen by the Government, it says, and it was likely to be the coal industry. The Government should prepare itself, the report says, by building up coal stocks at power stations, planning coal imports, encouraging haulage companies to recruit non-union drivers, and adapting all the power stations to burn oil as well as coal. As a deterrent, money should be cut off to the strikers and the union should be made to finance them. Finally, a large mobile force of police should be equipped to deal with the inevitable violent picketing. As the *Economist* predicted, little of the plan reached the Tory manifesto.

It has all, however, come true."

Even today, Norman Willis, the general secretary of the TUC, has suggested that the pit strike could go on for years. What a frightening thought that is when we analyse the cost to the nation. What a frightening thought it is for me as an hon. Member who represents miners, their wives and families and who knows what hardship they are enduring.

For the reasons that I have listed, which have been confirmed by economic experts, I ask the House to reduce our Christmas recess by two days to discuss fully the dispute in the mining industry, with the one aim of amicably resolving this long-lasting, damaging and frustrating dispute.

8.47 pm

Sir Paul Hawkins (Norfolk, South-West): I shall not be asking for the recess to be postponed. Indeed, I should like the longer recess to which we have become accustomed. If we had less legislation, we would have time for the debate that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) seeks and which I agree is long overdue.

I wish to draw attention to a matter that is important to the whole world. There is an extraordinary contrast between plenty in Europe and famine in Africa and elsewhere, yet the European Community is asking all farming communities in the EC to cut food production. That is crazy.

I recently attended a meeting in Europe at which experts forecast that large-scale famines will continue for the next 30 or 40 years. I understand that the desert is extending by at least 10 miles every year. Privately and through the Government, the European Community and humanitarian organisations, this country has been in the forefront of helping famine-stricken regions and we have also given help during other famines and disasters over the past 20 years.

However, we cannot go on working from hand to mouth. We ought to have a plan based on the facts and an expert understanding of the situation. I should like to urge the Government, along with our partners in the EC, to find out the real facts as to how long the famine conditions in Africa and, for that matter, in Bangladesh and elsewhere in future, are likely to last. They should then decide what important steps should be taken, and in what order. Should we go for providing water supplies or, perhaps, or planting forests? Indeed, I believe that much of the trouble with the desert conditions has been caused by the felling of forests throughout Africa. Perhaps we should be sending agricultural advisers to help people, to teach them to grow more food for themselves. That is an important aspect of the work that should be done.

We must carry out research into how the food that Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States can produce in abundance can be made palatable to Africans. Other than in extreme emergencies, it is not much good sending wheat to Africa, when Africans are used to eating maize. For that matter, it is not much use sending wheat to India when Indians prefer, and understand how to cook, other pulses, and so on.

Equally, it is important to be able to reduce the weight and bulk of food. The food sent in is often extremely bulky and that, in turn, greatly reduces the possibility of access to ports and of transportation. Ports are often primitive, and transport to the hinterland may be extremely limited and of poor quality.

The Government, together with our European partners, should look into those issues as a matter of urgency so that we can use the food that we could be growing here for the

[Sir Paul Hawkins]

rest of the world, and so that we can help those all over Africa and other parts of the world who are suffering from famine to obtain that food on a long-term basis. It is no use dealing with such famines on an ad hoc basis. Thus, I hope that during the coming months we shall hear of a plan to assist those famine areas on a long-term basis.

8.52 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I came into the debate a few minutes late. Normally, I am pretty much on the ball. I was involved in speaking to some miners from Northumberland who are still on strike, but I shall deal with that later.

My first point is that I have been making some inquiries, and have found out that there has apparently been no call to hold a debate, instead of adjourning, on the VAT that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is taking from the record produced by Band Aid. I cannot believe it. Three weeks ago I came in here and asked a question fairly innocently about the Government sending that money to Ethiopia instead of shoving it into the Chancellor's chest. I think that the VAT amounts to 18p on every record. Those young people who made the record gave their services freely, but the money is being coined by this Tory Government while all the people mentioned by the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) are starving in Ethiopia, the rest of Africa, central and south America, and elsewhere.

About a week later every man and his dog were on the radio. Every time I switched on the radio or television there was Dr. Death claiming that he wanted the VAT back. He was going to knock hell out of the Chancellor. Then there was the Liberal Chief Whip — [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] Indeed, where are the Liberals tonight? Is there a joint selection meeting on? The SDP and Liberal Members are all missing. David Steel finished up on television. He wanted VAT. They were all going to go knocking on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's door. Now they have a wonderful opportunity to speak on the subject just before Christmas. But I imagine that they have all gone. They have started on a fact-finding tour of the Caribbean. That is where they have them in the winter. They have not got the nous to come in here to raise that subject.

Having started this whole business, I am making a final appeal. I call on the Leader of the House, who used to be an expert on financial matters—

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): He still is.

Mr. Skinner: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman had got a fairly cushy number. In his job, he escapes all the facts and figures. He does not have to face all the brickbats that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the others have to face. He does not have to prop up the Secretary of State for the Environment. But as I have said, just before Christmas we are asking the Chancellor of the Exchequer to pay back that 18p on the millions of records that have been sold.

But having said that, I shall return to the subject of the miners. In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and others have said, I believe that there should have been a debate on the mining industry during the past few weeks. One of the things that appals me is that we constantly hear Government spokesmen and spokesmen for the coal board say on television that the miners do not want to do a deal. It is worth reminding hon. Members that the strike is not about money. It did not start because people were after increased wages. By and large, most strikes and industrial struggles are about wages and conditions. But this strike has nothing to do with that. It is the most honourable dispute to have taken place this century, because it is about saving jobs. Hon. Members should understand that.

With every year that has passed since I became a Member of Parliament, more jobs have been created in the House. There are more Members of Parliament now than when I first came here. There are also more people in the Press Gallery and more people to feed them. More people are employed all over the building. I am not complaining, but the House is one of the most uneconomic units in Britain. If the Prime Minister's philosophy of profit or die was applied to the House, it would have to close down. After all, the canteens do not make a profit. They had to have a massive write-off not so long ago. Carpets were put down at £24 a square yard. If the Grantham grocer's shop mentality had been applied to this House and to the other place, the reserves would have been exhausted years ago and both Houses would have shut.

With 4 million to 5 million people out of work — according to how often the figures have been massaged — we are saying that the miners are trying to stop another massive addition to unemployment. When the strike began it was not about what some newspapers would describe as greed and materialism, as most strikes are portrayed in the Tory press; it was about trying to keep people in work. That is an honourable cause to support.

The NUM has not put a single demand on the table. It has not asked for anything. It has never been to the coal board to say, "By the way, this is our demand. We are going to strike if you do not give in." That is not what the strike is about. The strike came about because the NCB said, "We are fed up with 'Plan for Coal'. We want to get rid of it. We are going to close 20 pits and get rid of 20,000 jobs, and if we get away with that, we shall close 70 pits and get rid of 70,000 jobs."

The NCB says, as the Government often do, that Arthur Scargill has not budged an inch, but how can he? We have not asked for anything. We have not asked for a 10 per cent. increase, so no one can ask why we do not compromise on 7 per cent. The argument is about jobs.

If the miners in south Wales—one of the peripheral coalfields—go back to work, they know that half the coalfield will go down. Towards the end of the century, there will probably not be a pit left in south Wales. One reason why the south Wales miners have been the strongest in the strike is that they can see mass unemployment, such as they have had to face for decades, facing them now. They do not want to stand any more of it.

Therefore, I hope that the people will understand that we cannot move, because we did not start the strike. We have nothing to move on. We did not ask the coal board for a single thing from 6 May throughout the strike.

I want to put forward another argument in this short debate. The miners are not engaged in any special pleading. In every statement they make, the Government give the impression—the Tory press, the BBC and ITV follow them, gladly it seems—that the miners and the NUM want something that no other industry has. In other words, they say that the industry must be economic; that it must make a profit or go under.

I have just mentioned the Houses of Parliament—an uneconomic unit. "Uneconomic" applies to nearly every industry in Britain. Take farms. The hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) has just put forward a plausible argument suggesting that it would make sense —economic sense, really—for the world to produce as much food as we possibly can and of the right kind. We could then shovel it across to Africa and all those other places where the poor kids are starving. As a principle, I do not argue with that philosophy. I would argue whether it has to be done under the aegis of the Common Market, but I believe that the argument is sound. I believe that Britain should produce enough food to cut down the import of food. That is a good argument as well. Therefore, I am not complaining about the overall strategy of subsidising uneconomic farms in Britain.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): There are none.

Mr. Skinner: According to the think tank report, which the hon. Gentleman supports—he can go to the Library and get the report; it is dated November 1983— the Government will be financing farms to the tune of £1,000 million throughout this financial year. With the CAP payments on top, that comes to the equivalent of an average of £20,000 for every farmer in the land.

On top of that, because we have some even more uneconomic farms called hill farms, especially in Wales and such places, the Government sensibly say — all Governments have done it—that it makes sense to give those farms where the terrain is difficult to develop, more money. So on top of that they get another £200 million called the hill farming subsidy. Nobody argues about that. It went through the House on the nod during the miners' strike.

If the miners were treated like the farmers—taking into account the reports from Andrew Glyn and the other five accountants — there would not be a single uneconomic pit in Britain. That is the truth of the matter.

The miners are not asking for anything special. We are just saying: do not treat us as well as the farmers but go half or a quarter of the way, and every mine in Britain would be profitable.

Let me make a comparison with the Japanese car company, Nissan. The Government have given £200 million to Nissan because it would not come to Britain and employ people unless they did give that money. That company will employ a maximum of 500 people in the north-east. That is equivalent to a £400,000 subsidy for each job. Arthur Scargill and the NUM are not asking for that kind of money. They do not want £400,000 for every employee in the NCB. They will settle for a small proportion of that. Hon. Gentlemen cannot talk about special pleading, because we are not asking for as much as the Government have handed over to that so-called super-efficient Japanese car company, which is destined to smash British Leyland.

I shall compare the miners with the British Broadcasting Corporation. Every BBC unit of production is uneconomic. The BBC has no super-pits as the miners have. If all the radio stations that have sprung up in the past decade had to live or die according to the philosophy, under which the Prime Minister say pits must operate, every one would close. The same is true of large sections of British industry.

I hear solicitors say, "I wouldn't support the miners' strike. Every single miner is living off the back of the taxpayer." When people tell me that the mines should make a profit or be closed, I ask them where they work. Nine times out of ten they work in an industry that receives a massive subsidy from the Government or which is fiddling the books, either in a fashion that is allowed by the law or in some other ways, such as fiddling tax and capital allowances. None of the advanced factories have been built by an entrepreneur who is carrying out the Prime Minister's philosophy of "make a profit or go under"; they have been built by taxpayers. How are they filled with equipment? Money for that also comes from taxpayers. Taxpayers subsidise those factories up to the hilt. That applies throughout the British economy.

Every multiple store that uses cheap labour under the youth training scheme is subsidised. The £25 a week is paid for by taxpayers. The miners are not asking for as much as that. They do not want to be treated as well as that. We are not pleading a special case.

Most ironic is the fact that the so-called super-efficient oil industry is also receiving taxpayers' money. That is according to *The Daily Telegraph* of today. Most people imagine that oil companies can manage well, but, they have now run into difficult strata underground, just as we do in pits. Because some pits in south Wales are more difficult to mine, it costs more to extract the coal. The oil companies started with big economic pools of oil and have now drained most of them. *The Daily Telegraph* states that there is a rush for North sea oil licences. It continues:

> "Companies have been encouraged by the tax incentives aimed at encouraging offshore development, and the Government's anxiety to see the development of the smaller finds now accounting for most of the discoveries and the [illegible] of exploration of deeper waters."

That is exactly the problem of the so-called uneconomic pits. We have deep pits with small, narrow seams, but because the oil company is primarily in the private sector, it will get tax handouts to develop small, uneconomic pools of oil.

There is hardly a segment of the British economy that is not subsidised to some extent. Therefore, the miners are not receiving anything extra from the Government. Perhaps the most important and easiest comparison is with the Common Market. I know that the Leader of the House does not like it. On many occasions we trooped through the Lobbies against it in 1971 and 1972. I think we voted 36 times out of 36.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): I voted more often than the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: No, I was there every time. I did not miss one vote, nor did the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I am still opposed to the Common Market. The Common Market is up to its neck in debt. If the Government applied the same rule of thumb to the Common Market as they do to the mines, it would have been closed yesterday.

This autumn, the Common Market asked for more money from Britain and the other countries. The Community treats us with contempt. During the past few days, a couple of Common Market commissioners, because they are so contemptuous of the way they operate and because they have mechanisms that allow them to do what they wish, were promoted to vice-president for three weeks to increase their pensions by £2,500 a year. Yet the Government talk about mines having to make a profit.

[Mr. Skinner]

The most startling example of the Government's double standards was mentioned in the House on Monday. A gold bullion mine, Johnson Matthey Bankers, discovered that it reserves were exhausted in the last few days of September, yet it traded when it knew that it was insolvent. The Government decided to prop it up to the tune of £75 million so that their friends in the City could stay in business——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Rubbish.

Mr. Skinner: It is not rubbish. I remember the night —30 September—when 200 people were brought to the Bank of England in Threadneedle street. There was no ballot. They did not bring in all the investors, and some of them were not even contacted by telephone. It was the most undemocratic procedure that has been carried out in the City, although it has seen a few in its time. Those 200 square briefcases went to the Bank of England to concoct a deal which the Chancellor of the Exchequer, by a nod and a wink, had said they could, to patch up the bank. It could not be allowed to fail because others would have fallen like dominoes. They have managed to hold it together since with taxpayers' money.

That is why we should have a debate on the miners before the recess. It will save money. There has been much talk about the public sector borrowing requirement. There is always one totem pole that must be saved. Since I have been a Member of Parliament, we have had to have wage restrictions to stop the value of the pound increasing; we have had incomes policies to stop the pound decreasing in value; and the same is true now of the PSBR.

Contrary to what the press and the media say, at the last ACAS meeting the members of the NUM executive said, "We will accept the final suggestion from ACAS." The media give the impression that the NUM turned down that proposal. That is a lie. Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey agreed to the last ACAS proposal. In Wales and the peripheral areas, where the miners know that there will be massive closures if MacGregor and the Prime Minister get their way, they will stay out and fight.

The Government have had some luck during the past 40 weeks. They have had to settle many pay claims from other trade unions because they do not want two major industrial disputes at the same time. But that will not continue for ever. I hope that they realise that, as the new pay rounds go through, there will be further industrial action on different fronts. They will not give in constantly. NACODS has turned down the first offer of 5·2 per cent., and I am encouraging that union to fight until it obtains a better deal and to take action if necessary. The Government will not be able to buy off those unions for ever.

I am confident that if the miners of Wales, Scotland and all the British coalfields, including Yorkshire, stand their ground, we can win this battle. But it is a scandal that the British taxpayer has been asked to pay £5,000 million to back the Prime Minister in a war of attrition against the miners. That represents £100 for every man, woman and child in the country. That is what everyone has paid until now to finance a strike that was started by the Government and by MacGregor. However, provided that we can maintain our resolve and determination, we shall win the fight.

9.15 pm

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): Before the House rises for the Christmas recess, it should have the opportunity to address itself to a number of issues connected with certain national services provided for our constituents. If this proves not to be possible during Advent, perhaps, after Epiphany, parliamentary time could be found to advantage.

On the Order Paper, in my name, is early-day motion 208 on the future of the pharmaceutical industry. This would provide a chance for wide-ranging discussions not only on the National Health Service, but on the contribution of drug manufacturers to the medical requirements of our citizens. My motion states:

"That this House, while recognising the need for value for money in the National Health Service and the possible rôle that generic drug substitution may have in achieving this, nevertheless urges Her Majesty's Government to give fullest consideration to the consequences of mandatory prescribing for the current and future strength and success of the pharmaceutical industry and of companies such as Roche, both in terms of ability to engage in continuing research and development and of satisfying the requirements of patient care."

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will immediately recall that Roche is a major employer in my constituency, as are other companies such as Smith, Kline and French, and that the pharmaceutical industry is an important contributor to the health—in more ways than one—of Hertfordshire. I very much welcome the fact that the Government have recognised the need for a consultation process over such a fundamental change in NHS policy, and I trust that the concerns expressed by Roche and its employees, together with those of the medical profession, will be given the attention that they undoubtedly deserve.

A further aspect of the NHS, and the subject of current parliamentary questions from me, is the planned development of the Welfield site in Hatfield for the expansion of geriatric and other patient care by the health authority. The recognition of the increased needs of the elderly in mid-Hertfordshire is very much to be applauded, and has been advocated by me and relevant individuals and organisations for the past five years or more. It is firmly to be hoped that the forthcoming inquiry will ensure the go-ahead for this much needed additional facility.

Other national services that are constantly the subject of the concern and scrutiny of my constituents are those that provide many of the public utilities—in particular, gas, electricity, telephone and water. On the latter, I am especially gratified that, after I have campaigned since my election to Parliament for the greater availability of water meters, the Government recently responded in this House by announcing a joint study between the water industry and the Department of the Environment on the possible extension of water metering generally to households.

Also on the Order Paper in my name is a private Member's Bill, the Standing Charges (Abolition) Bill, which is awaiting a Second Reading debate. This too would provide a chance for a wide-ranging discussion not only of the public utilities, but of the unfairness of the creation, in effect, of another tax without recognition of the ability to pay or of the level of consumption. My Bill seeks to abolish the levying of public utility standing charges.

My right hon. Friend will, I am sure, be aware that a typical family pays almost £3 a week in standing charges for gas, electricity, telephone and water before enjoying

the benefit of any of those facilities. The net result is to impose a flat rate burden, which often falls most heavily on those least able to bear it.

Although the possible consequences of my measure would be a rise in the price of units used, it has been estimated that nearly two thirds of consumers would be better off by such a fairer system. If one considers the case of the elderly, an even greater number of them would gain from such a change, and this would be of special value in Welwyn/Hatfield, which has a growing pensioner population especially anxious about the cost of such services, on which it is increasingly dependent.

If I recognise the limitations on the time available before the House rises for the coming recess for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I am certain that he will appreciate that this is a sign of yuletide goodwill to all men. However, may I encourage him during the 12 days of Christmas, to find a moment to reflect and make a new year's resolution to provide the opportunities that I have shown, albeit briefly, are needed?

9.19 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before the House rises for the Christmas recess I hope that it will seize the opportunity at its disposal to save life. Shortly after being elected to this place I was extremely disappointed when the House had an opportunity to save life but voted against the restoration of capital punishment. Because of its failure to act, murder as a crime goes unchecked and has, indeed, increased.

Another type of murder is committed thoughout the world, and especially in Britain — abortion. A few weeks ago, I saw a film called "The Silent Scream" and witnessed the calculated destruction of a human being and the dismemberment and the extraction of an unborn baby from its mother's womb. I saw abortion take place, and the ultrasound film gave me an inside view of what happens during that operation. What a contrast it was to the delight I experienced early this year when my wife gave birth to our first child, and I had the joy of understanding a little of the miracle of life.

The author of "The Silent Scream", Dr. Bernard Nathanson, used to run the biggest abortion clinic in the world and between 1968 and 1978 presided over 100,000 abortions. Today, Dr. Nathanson no longer campaigns for abortion but instead condemns it. He now believes that human life before birth is human life and that abortion destroys human babies. Thanks to the work of the three scientists and Nobel prize winners, Crick, Howell and Watson we now know that at conception something completely new is created, which can be traced from then on in an unbroken line of form and substance through birth, development and adulthood. Everything that a human individual will be is present in the first cell that is created by the fusion of the male sperm and the female ovum. Left in the correct environment, the early human being will grow and develop. By 11 weeks, the foetus is clearly recognisable as a human baby. A baby at that stage of gestation was aborted in Dr. Nathanson's ultrasound film.

The science of foetology has given us a wealth of information about unborn human life, yet we still question the validity of those babies. No one doubted the humanity of Louise Brown when she was created in vitro, and scientists witnessed the beginning of new life. We question human life only when it is unwanted and inconvenient and the decision is made to abort it. However, we cannot pick and choose about human life and say who is human and who is not. In 1983, we destroyed more than 171,000 babies by abortion in Britain. Numerous women have been profoundly physically and emotionally scarred by abortion.

Abortion is not always a safe or simple operation. The fact that abortion is legal does not make it safe. In May 1980, Dr. Robert Winston of London's Hammersmith hospital said:

> "Abortion, even done by the best hands, can lead to infection of the tubes and ultimately infertility."

There are those who fear that we shall return to back street abortions if there is any restriction on current legislation, yet, in countries where there has been a tightening of the abortion laws there has not been an increase in abortion deaths.

Abortion is not the great panacea for all social ills. A liberal abortion law has not fulfilled the promise of the slogan, "Every child a wanted child". According to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the number of children physically injured by their parents rose by almost 50 per cent. in the three years to 1982. Many aspects of the Warnock report have been profoundly disturbing to people throughout the country, so I am delighted that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) is to introduce a private Member's Bill concerning one aspect of the report. However, I feel that the Government should take urgent action, especially on the whole issue of abortion.

I would not wish to go into gory details, but the instrument the abortionist uses enters the womb and the baby rears away in anguish. As the instrument moves towards the child, it can clearly be seen to open its mouth in terror; so the title "The Silent Scream" is not used for dramatic effect. I challenge every hon. Member to see the film, remain unmoved by it and still be prepared to be a party to the murder of the innocent. Abortion should not be used as a form of birth control.

9.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): In this Session we have had considerable debate about certain aspects of the public and private sectors. There is, of course, a third vitally important sector—the charitable and voluntary sector—about which we have had little discussion. The House should have a debate on that before it adjourns for the Christmas recess.

There is a wide range of subjects which at the moment are sources of anxiety and which, if dealt with piecemeal, will have an unsatisfactory conclusion. There is considerable anxiety about the role of the Charity Commission. Set up in the middle of the 19th century as a branch of the High Court, the Charity Commission has a large staff, but everyone says that the commission is incapable of carrying out the job for which it is intended because it has inappropriate and insufficient staff. That must be a matter of anxiety.

In the summer there was a short debate on a private Member's motion, during which the Home Office Minister with responsibility for charities admitted that he was anxious about charity fund raisers and the way in which they can often take a disproportionately large share of the money that they raise. There have been disturbing examples—fortunately, few and far between—of people who raise money dishonestly for charity or claim to be

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

raising money for charity when they are not. My right hon. Friend the Minister promised to study the matter seriously. It would be good if some evidence of that scrutiny were to be forthcoming.

It is possible to change some of the ways in which charities are financed. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is aware, not long ago a group of hon. Members produced a pamphlet which contained some suggestions that deserve a response from the Government.

An important question is: what will happen to charities and charitable funding—in this I include the voluntary organisations, some of which are not charities—when the metropolitan counties and the GLC are abolished? I have no doubt that they will have a prosperous and useful future. In their dying stages, the GLC and metropolitan counties have taken enormous pains to finance a wide range of voluntary organisations and charities so that they may widen their constituency base. When those organisations have disappeared, are the Government confident that they can ensure that a great deal of the work that is being carried out will be continued successfully?

I should declare an interest as a trustee of Community Service Volunteers. In that organisation, and in a great many others, it has been well demonstrated that it can be cost effective to deploy volunteers on socially acceptable and useful work which costs considerably less than some of the Manpower Services Commission's schemes and with results that bear comparison with them.

I should like my right hon. Friend in his reply to address himself to the fact that each time we go to the Government with a suggestion about expanding the work that is being done by the organisations I have described, we are often unsuccessful, even when the case seems to be unanswerable.

9.30 pm

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Before we adjourn for the Christmas recess I wish to talk about road safety, especially drinking and driving. I am particularly concerned about the Government's campaign to "Keep low", which seems to suggest that we should not drink too much before we drive. That is unacceptable. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport has made it clear that she is against drinking and then driving but, unfortunately, the campaign message does not give that impression. I remain concerned, even now, that one should not drink and drive.

I am concerned also that so many accidents occur on stretches of motorway that are unlit. Recently and tragically, 10 people lost their lives on the M25. That happened on one day last week when there was thick fog. I do not wish to prejudge the inquiry, but I maintain and submit that if the M25 had been properly lit throughout its length, with the warning signals working and speed limits being adhered to strictly, there might have been a different result. With the Lion Intoximeter 3000 breathalyser working properly, or an alternative breathalyser, perhaps some of those who might have been tempted to have a little too much to drink, or who should not have been on the roads at the time, would have taken notice of the prevailing conditions and slowed down, or stopped driving altogether.

There are 1,688 miles of motorway in England and Wales and only 338 miles are illuminated. It seems obvious that if the remaining stretches were illuminated there would be a safer system and lives would be saved. In a written answer to me on 12 December it was estimated that the cost of lighting the remaining unlit stretches of Britain's motorways would be £90 million. Running costs would be £9 million. When the M25 is completed, an additional £7 million would enable it to be fully illuminated. Having a Leicester constituency, I travel on the M1 frequently, and it seems that it would cost £9 million to illuminate the stretches which are presently dark.

Speaking of the M1 and Leicester, I should say that I shall not be taking part in the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill which will be initiated by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), but I can assure the House that I remain totally in favour of rate capping and against any campaign by Leicester city council to oppose it. I shall continue to fight for my constituents, who I know support the idea that the rates will be much fairer with rate capping.

Each night-time fatal accident on our motorways in 1983 cost £205,460. With 206 people on average being killed each year on our motorways, we would be saving money by ensuring that lights were provided along all stretches of motorway.

I shall resume my place as I know that others wish to speak. However, I shall be grateful if my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House devotes a part of what I know will be an excellent speech to the state of safety on Britain's roads.

9.33 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I do not think that the House should adjourn for the Christmas recess until, as my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) have argued, it has fully debated the miners' strike and the Government's attack on the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Conservative party's attack on the NUM started before the beginning of the dispute which has continued for 10 months. It goes back to a report which was prepared by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who is now the Secretary of State for Transport. That document was commonly called the Ridley report, and it was leaked in 1978 to *The Economist*. It showed that the then Conservative Opposition were preparing to attack what they regarded as the main political enemies of a future Tory Government. Those enemies were, of course, trade unions such as the NUM which would refuse to sacrifice jobs and communities at the command of a Conservative Prime Minister and Cabinet.

In such a debate, we should get to grips with the argument that is advanced by the occupants of the Government Front Bench that the miners' dispute started on 6 March when Ian MacGregor of the National Coal Board tried to save the country £135 million of uneconomic spending on the coal industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover has said, the Government have wasted nearly £5,000 million, 37 times more than the stated target of the original savings when the dispute began. Had the dispute not taken place, there could have been a £25 a week increase for every registered unemployed person. There could have been a £4 a week decrease in the taxes paid by every working person. I am sure that that would have gained wide support throughout

Britain. It is nothing to do with economic or uneconomic pits. The coal board's losses have been adequately torn to bits by reports such as that of Dr. Andrew Glyn of Oxford university.

When I was lucky enough to intervene in the debate about a fortnight ago on the orders for increasing the subvention to the coal industry, I told the Minister that the coal board had to pay interest back to the Government, pensions to retired mineworkers and compensation for subsidence of people's houses, especially in the Nottinghamshire and Mansfield area, caused by pits that might have closed down some years ago. I said that those costs still had to be borne by the industry even if every pit were closed. When I said that those costs as a whole should be borne by the Government, the Minister said that that was not economic sense, and that every business had to bear such costs. If we could remove such things from the coal board's accounts, Cortonwood would be making a profit of £6 per tonne of coal and the industry as a whole would be making a profit. The argument has nowt to do with economic or uneconomic pits. That should be brought out in a debate.

What should also be brought out in a debate on the coal strike and its ramifications is the way in which the Government have been prepared since the mid-1970s to try to take on and destroy the trade union movement, with its ability to protect working people. They thought, in the words of Lord Stockton, that if the brigade of guards of the working class, the NUM, could be cracked first, other workers would be demoralised and despair, and would not stand up and fight.

Two years ago, in what was probably one of the best years for British capitalism for some time, 30 to 40 per cent. of the capacity of major industries such as chemicals, engineering, construction and glass, was laid waste and idle. In the timber and furniture industry, 52 per cent. of the capacity could not be used. The situation has worsened since then and is getting worse under the Government, in the 1980s. The Government are worried about resistance to future massive redundancies, so they want to demoralise the trade unions. It is nowt to do with the tonnes of coal coming out of the ground; it is about destroying the capacity of the trade union movement to fight against the Tory Government.

We should debate that matter before anyone in the House goes home for a couple of weeks' holiday over Christmas while hundreds of thousands of miners and their families suffer. The House should debate the miners' strike rather than adjourn.

9.37 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): We have had the expected but nevertheless welcome series of short and serious speeches that are a feature of these three-hour Adjournment debates. No fewer than 18 hon. Members have raised matters of great concern not only to them and their constituents, but to the House and country. The Leader of the House will have his time cut out to answer them all intelligently.

When we debated the summer recess, the Opposition amended the motion because they did not think it right that hon. Members should be away and unable to influence Government policy for some 13 weeks while the miners' strike continued. It is with dismay and foreboding—a sentiment echoed and amplified by my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist)—that one has to record the fact that the strike, which began over nine months ago, is still proceeding and we still await the first Government intervention to help to achieve its solution.

Nevertheless, the short break of less than three weeks between 21 December and 9 January is not open to the objections of the summer, and we shall accept the Adjournment motion, although with reservations, in the hope and expectation that we shall have replies to the points raised in the debate.

Many specific questions and grievances were raised today that I would wish to echo and reinforce. I refer, first, to the matter raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin), who brought up the tragic case of the post-Christmas deportation of a Cypriot family in his constituency who have been here for more than 10 years. Indeed, the eldest of Mrs. Halil's three children is 11 years old and was born in the United Kingdom. I had always thought that, in administering the Immigration Act, the Government's general policy was to give more favourable consideration to those who have been in the country for more than 10 years, particularly those who came here before 1 January 1973 when the new Act came into effect. I hope that the Leader of the House will deal with the various points raised and tell us that he has been able to give new and favourable consideration to that particular case.

The second matter was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), and I hope that the Leader of the House will reconsider it extremely carefully. It is wrong that no opportunity has been given and none will be given for the House to debate the important issue of the introduction of fees for entry certificates. It is even more astonishing that the order, which has apparently been laid today and is due to take effect from 1 January when the House is in recess, has escaped scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, which met yesterday and which will not have the opportunity to consider the order before it comes into force. It is entirely wrong for Foreign Office Ministers to table an order before that Committee has had the chance to scrutinise it.

The third matter was raised by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Post office closures affect most of us, and especially those who represent inner city constituencies. The only reason for closures on the scale contemplated is that the Post Office, which is not making any overall loss, has been required in the forthcoming year, under its so-called external financing limit, to make a net contribution to the Treasury of no less than £70 million in addition to all its normal costs and the servicing of its obligations. That is what is putting the pressure on post office services which are especially important in inner city areas and in communities in which a large number of people do not use banks and are heavy users of the various services of the Department of Health and Social Security which are administered through post offices. In many areas, pensioners, the disabled, the unemployed and women with small children will be seriously affected if their local post offices are closed.

In addition to those specific matters, I hope that the Leader of the House will address himself to two main issues. The first is the growing national concern about unemployment which has been reflected in so many

[Mr. Peter Shore]

speeches today. The seriousness of the problem and the remorseless way in which the numbers have increased is reflected in the pre-Christmas count taken each November for the period of Conservative rule. The figures are 1,259,000 in 1979; 2,016,000 in 1980; 2,770,000 in 1981; 3,063,000 in 1982; 3,084,000 in 1983; and 3,223,000 in November 1984. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Markerfield (Mr. McGuire) pointed out, the underlying trend is still an increase of about 20,000 per month. Moreover, the figures that I have given understate the true extent of unemployment. What is so dismally impressive about those figures is that they have grown larger every year. We are now in the sixth year of the Prime Minister's experiment and there is no sign of the number ceasing to grow, let alone of any reduction in the appalling total.

In 1984 the country has finally begun to wake up to the reality and the cost of what has happened to it. Conservative Members have at last begun to understand that, far from being a temporary expedient in consequence of policies designed to defeat inflation and to create more so-called real jobs, unemployment is endemic in the Government's whole monetarist and deflationary strategy. Many members of the Conservative party now seem to be uneasy about their Government's core policies. We hope to see the effects of that unease as the Session proceeds, not just in revolts on local government capital expenditure, such as there have been and will be, but in a changing attitude towards the role of government and the provision of community and social services generally.

I must also mention the tragedy of drought, hunger and famine not only in Ethiopia, but in vast and growing areas of the African continent. There is a clamant need for immediate action for relief. The British people expect such action from their Government. That is why — as my hon. friend the Member for Bolsover mentioned—they do not understand why the Government have failed to make their own contribution in terms of VAT to the moneys raised by the Band Aid record.

The problem is long-term and deep-seated. There has been plenty of warning. In September 1984 the World Bank, in its third report on sub-Saharan Africa, stated:

"The spectre of disaster. . . confronts Africa and the international community."

It is estimated that the famine in Africa threatens some 35 million people. The Christian West, with its food stores bulging with surplus grain, and other products has a duty to assist, but it has shown little recognition of the scale of the problem, its likely duration or the suffering involved.

The hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) had his own agricultural interests in mind, but he made a strong point when he said that what was needed was a longer-term plan to enable us to assist a continent which is in dire difficulties and will continue to face problems for many years. I hope that the Leader of the House will at least have something encouraging to say on that matter.

9.47 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): First, I thank the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) for endorsing the adjournment motion. He did so in a somewhat fastifious fashion, but in these difficult times the Treasury Bench is happy to receive support on any basis.

The right hon. Gentleman made some pertinent points. I hope that he will not think me dismissive if I try to contain them within my review of the debate as a whole. About 20 speeches have been made this evening and if I am to cover them all I shall be under a constraint in terms of time.

The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin), who opened the debate, put with great force the case for Mrs. Halil. I shall refer the matter to the Home Office again. However, I should place on record the fact that, as recently as 1981, Mrs. Halil was deported after her case had been fully considered not only by the immigration appellate authorities, but also by the House of Lords, and that she defied that order by returning illegally, using another name.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) told us about the problems of the farm college in his county. We all hope for a successful and common-sense resolution of the difficulty. I will draw the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends to my hon. Friend's belief that an initiative to the new European Commission could prove valuable. Incidentally, we were all transfixed by the revelation that Cornwall has the finest pasture land in the United Kingdom. Clearly that fact is reflected in the margins of dairy farmers in that part of the country, and we will bear it in mind when—as seems regularly to happen—there is another peasants' revolt in the south-west.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) referred to the sad fate of Mr. Alan Russell, who is now languishing in gaol in Libya. My hon. Friend will be encouraged by the fact that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was on the Front Bench to hear his comments. I hope that he will take comfort from that fact.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), who has explained why he has to be absent, ran a trailer for the debate which will take place later today on the television licence fee. I enjoyed my hon. Friend's trenchant comments. Mercifully I am not required to endorse his strictures on the BBC. Nevertheless, he set out what must be the real anxieties. The debate concerns the licence fee charge and the core services of the BBC which should be covered by such a charge, which is regressive in its impact. There is a constructive debate to be had on that matter.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McGuire) opened the topical issue of unemployment, to which the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney also referred. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) and the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) also contributed on this topic. I accept that this will be a continuing and major feature of political debate in the House as the Session proceeds into 1985. I should like to make just one contribution in the dying days of December. The training programme, which is running at £2 billion a year, and the great emphasis on improving the quality of the youth training scheme are an integral part of the campaign to provide a better pattern of employment. Much will turn on the mobility of our society and its response to the sharp economic challenge, which is wholly unavoidable for a nation with such a maritime and overseas trading tradition. Our ability to respond to such

a challenge, which is the opposite of what is promulgated in terms of a protectionist resolution of the coal dispute, will be at the heart of the public debate of this matter.

I should like now to deal with the important issue of fees for entry certificates. I fear that the fox on which I was relying was well and truly shot, because I understand that the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) is not proceeding with the plan for a debate on this issue tonight. I fully understand that the hon. Gentleman has pursued this matter. As he said, he has raised three points of order which have been conducted with not uncommon for him but nevertheless uncommon courtesy in these times. I shall of course refer what he said to the Foreign Office. I entirely understand that his anxieties are held with great conviction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Sir K. Lewis) brought a note of philosophy to our proceedings. I do not believe in the politics of crusade. Crusades are all right for a while but then one has to change gear. The consolidation that follows a crusade begins to anchor a new climate in which politics are debated and in which social democracy gradually replaces the more exotic forms of Socialism which adorn the Opposition Front Bench—although not at the moment. My hon. Friend and I are at one in believing that we have a greater task in this than perpetual revolution. However, it was a little unnecessary for him to bring an echo of our previous debate into this one. I thought that all passion had been spent. He said that his vote had been cast with the utmost reluctance and reservation. I must inform him that the Whips Office, I suspect rather like the England changing room, goes on the homely philosophy that they all look the same on the score board.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised important issues concerning the Post Office, which I shall refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and fearful cases of recent crime. The collection of central records is always a delicate issue and for someone who sits the Bench that he occupies, it must be especially delicate. He will appreciate, therefore, that this is an issue on which we must try to have a reflective rather than an instant response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes) made some pertinent comments on the present qualities of the Church of England. I do not think that there is any requirement of me other than to note them, but I cannot resist the temptation to say that I have a lively sympathy with what he argued. It is perfectly proper for the Church to take a lively interest in contemporary social, economic and, perhaps, political matters. However, in the 18th century, when the Church became so other-worldly, it was quite unable to identify the spiritual poverty which brought forth the Methodist revival. There is a spiritual challenge, which can easily be overlooked, if the Church concentrates too heavily on other dimensions of its natural work.

The coal industry dispute was featured by the hon. Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). There can be a considerable diversion into matters of accountancy, but I suspect that charges of faulty accountancy will not long outface the basic fact that at present a subsidy of £1,300 million annually is being paid to the coal industry.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I have an obligation to the House.

There are sound arguments for the economic concentration of the coal industry around those areas where it can perform to greatest effect. We have experienced this in respect of textiles, engineering, shipbuilding and footwear. It is simply quite untrue to say that we can insulate the coal industry from these other factors.

The hon. Member for Bolsover, whose contributions did not suffer from any understatement, feels a certain anxiety. But the strategems of the Government are not undermining his position. It is the action of one third of the coal miners who are still at work aided particularly by the 16,500 who have returned in recent weeks. They are also aided by those, predominantly trade unionists, engaged in the movement of coal, those engaged in the unloading of record shipments of imported coal and those at the power stations undertaking coalburn. The organised industrial class is undermining the position of the hon. Member for Bolsover, and although I am happy for those skills to be visited on the Government, I must tell him that is how it is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) referred to the problems in the pharmaceutical industry. My heart has other causes to which it warms more immediately, but none the less this is an important issue to my hon. Friend, who has a major pharmaceutical producer in his constituency. He is perfectly right to say that its voice, as well as many others, must be heard.

I note the enthusiasm for water meters. I only hope that that is not what at first sight seems to be an easy solution to proper levels of charging in that industry, because the House will learn to address itself increasingly to this issue over the coming years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) made a powerful speech on abortion. While I can offer no promises of Government legislation, the Warnock proposals will come before the House in the new year, in the form of a private Member's Bill prepared by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) —[HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon. Friend?"] Yes, why not?

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) again expressed great interest in charities——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Biffen: Happy Christmas.

Mr. Speaker: And the same to the right hon. Gentleman.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, Mr. Speaker *put the Question pursuant to Standing Order No. 12 (Periodic Adjournments).*

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House at its rising on Friday 21st December do adjourn till Wednesday 9th January.

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 113 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Nuclear Weapons (Tests)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Between 1952 and 1958 the United Kingdom conducted 21 atmospheric nuclear weapons tests at the Monte Bello Islands off the coast of Western Australia, at Emu Field and Maralinga in South Australia and at Malden Island and Christmas Island in the south Pacific. In addition, between 1953 and 1963 experiments in which some radioactive materials were dispersed into the environment were carried out in South Australia. Clean-up operations were carried out in 1963, 1964 and 1967. For some years there has been considerable concern about the effects of those nuclear weapons tests by Britain in Australia and the south Pacific, about the amount of radiation emitted during the tests, about the precautions that were or were not taken during the tests, about the contamination of the land and the natural environment by the nuclear explosions, about the damaging effect on the local aborigine population and about the damage that these tests may have done to the health of the servicemen and civilians who participated in them. I am sure that we should have the fullest information about the nature of these tests, about how they were conducted and about the results of the tests.

As a result of the concern that has been expressed in this country and particularly in Australia, in March 1983 the Australian Government asked Professor Kerr of Sydney university to look into the studies that had previously been carried out in Australia. Professor Kerr concluded that important data had not been considered by these studies and recommended that a full-scale Royal Commission should be set up. That Royal Commission was set up in July of this year under Mr. James McClelland. The setting-up of that Royal Commission reflects the widespread concern and anxiety in Australia about the reports of the precautions that were or were not taken, about the effects of the tests on the aborigine population and about the damage to the environment.

It was enormously important that the Australian Government took the decision to set up a Royal Commission. As the Minister will acknowledge, there was criticism in the first few months of the extent to which the British Government would co-operate with the commission. The Minister has recently indicated that some of the inhibitions of the Official Secrets Act will be relaxed to enable, in certain conditions, some people to give evidence about what happened during the tests. The Royal Commission is coming to this country next month. The Government have stated that they intend to give evidence to the commission. It is very important that the Minister should advise us about the information that will be made available by the British Government to the Royal Commission. There is no longer a case for secrecy. Surely the commission and the public are entitled to all the information about those tests.

Let me deal with the evidence that has been given in Australia to the Royal Commission. I make no apology for quoting again from some of the press reports in this country of the evidence given in Australia to the Royal Commission. A number of reports appeared in *The Times* from Mr. Tony Duboudin in Melbourne. One said:

"The highlight of last week's hearing was the allegation on Wednesday by a former Army lance-corporal who told the inquiry that 200 British and Australian servicemen were threatened with court-martial and the possibility of a firing squad if they recounted an incident in which an aboriginal family wandered into the Marcoo nuclear bomb testing site at Maralinga in the outback of South Australia.

Mr. John Hutton told the commission that on one morning in May, 1956, while he was putting on protective clothing in a caravan before going out into a 'dirty' area around the Marcoo site to help scientists, he saw an Aboriginal man aged about 20, through the window of the caravan, standing in the contaminated area."

That was about seven months after a nuclear bomb had been tested there. Another report said:

"The bodies of five Aboriginals were found near an Atomic bomb test site in South Australia in 1956, the Royal Commission into British nuclear tests in Australia was told in Brisbane yesterday.

Mr. Terry Troom, a former soldier, said he found the bodies of two adults and three children while on a mail run with five other soldiers. He described the bodies as being all skin and bones and said they were lying under a tree . . . After his commanding officer was told of the discovery, he believed that bulldozers were moved into the area."

I quoted reports of the evidence given to the Royal Commission in a debate on the Army just after the summer recess. The Minister who replied to the debate did not refer to my speech—I make no criticism of that—so I wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence, and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who is to reply to this debate, wrote to me:

"As regards the 'horrific' reports in the media of allegations made to the Royal Commission, most of the allegations are not new and many of them first surfaced during the time of the tests. However, I can assure you that Her Majesty's Government is not goin to allow the Royal Commission to remain ignorant of the true facts. I have already announced that the UK is to seek to be represented before the Commission and that it intends to give evidence."

I welcome the fact that the United Kingdom is to appear before the Commission, but no matter how old the allegations may be, they are important and we are entitled to ask whether there is any basis for the reports in the media. They are horrific and alarming and they cast great doubt on the validity of the claim that all adequate precautions were taken. It is not sufficient to say that the allegations were made at the time of the tests and have been repeated since then.

It is important that we have a statement from the people who know, and the Government have the data and the records and, I expect, full and detailed reports of everything that happened during the tests. Will the Minister tell us whether there is some basis for the horrific reports, or will the Government wait until they are represented at the commission in January before telling us whether there is truth in the disturbing evidence given, in the main, by Australian ex-service men?

There is substantial worry that adequate precautions were not taken during all the tests in Australia and the south Pacific. The Ministry of Defence has repeatedly assured us that the precautions were adequate, but it is surprising that many British ex-service men have stated that they did not wear protective clothing and that proper precautions were not taken.

I shall not quote the statements of all those service men, but there are fears that the instruments for measuring radiation—the badges that were supposed to be worn by service men—were not worn regularly and that in many instances the radiation to which service men were exposed was not recorded. Are the anxieties that are being expressed, particularly in Australia, about the measurement of radiation valid? Was the measurement of radiation as reliable as the Government have maintained?

Earlier I mentioned the contamination of the land, and I think particularly of the position at Maralinga. To what extent has the land and environment been damaged for a very long time by the radiation and the plutonium left there? How successful were the cleaning-up operations? Are the reports true that the land is still contaminated and that a very difficult and costly operation will have to be carried out if there is to be any hope of reducing the level of contamination? What about the reports that some of the aborigine population have been exposed to very high and damaging levels of radiation?

Above all, concern in this country has naturally focused on the very large number of service men who believe that their health has been damaged as a result of participating in the tests.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): I know that the hon. Gentleman has made a very considerable study of this problem. However, he has just referred to a very large number of service men who believe that their present illnesses are due to the tests. Can he put any figure on that?

Mr. Strang: The figure that I have seen reported is up to 300. However, I should be the first to acknowledge that much of that data is dependent on the valiant efforts made by the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association to collect information. Whatever the figure is, we must expect it to represent only a fraction of the number of those who have suffered from leukaemia. As I have made clear in every debate on this subject in which I have spoken, I accept that the proposition that those tests damaged the health of those service men or civilians is unproven. Of course, in the normal course of events, a significant proportion of those service men, particularly at their present age, might be expected to die of leukaemia and other diseases that can be caused by radiation. But we cannot dismiss the other possibility.

The Government have set up an investigation. We are grateful for the very full note that I believe the Minister provided all Members of Parliament with on 6 December. It contains some useful information and data on the actual yields of all the tests. But it is somewhat regrettable that he should insist on asserting that he is convinced that no damage has been done to those service men. The last paragraph of the letter from the Minister dated 20 November 1984, which I quoted from earlier, states:

"In conclusion, I repeat that I have every confidence that the test programmes in Australia were planned meticulously and conducted responsibly, and that the safety precautions adopted at the time were more than adequate to ensure that no one should have suffered harm arising from the ionising radiation produced during the test programmes."

Some service men believe that in making that statement, the Minister is in danger of prejudging the outcome of the inquiry being carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board. The Minister is well aware of the work that the BNTVA, and Mr. McGinley as chairman, have put into this subject. Indeed, I hope that he will say something about the progress of that investigation. But I together with the BNTVA and many other people in this country still believe that, given the nature of the tests, the fears that have been expressed and the claims that have been made by those service men, it is not appropriate that the survey should be carried out on the basis of information supplied by the Ministry of Defence.

The Ministry supplies the names and addresses of the service men who participated in the tests. In addition, the Ministry of Defence supplies the names of the control group. I do not cast aspersions on the Ministry but the survey is basically being conducted by the Government. On the one hand the Ministry of Defence provides the data about the service men and civilians who participated in the tests and on the other it provides the data about the control group.

Secondly, the study is being carried out by a body that is funded by the Government and, at the same time, all its members are appointed by the Government. We respect the work of the people in the Ministry and in the NRPB, but it is to misjudge the situation to believe that that type of inquiry is adequate.

Most important of all, the service men should have full confidence in the inquiry. Therefore, I again stress to the Minister that we want a proper independent inquiry. If we cannot have a British Royal Commission, we should have a national committee, with leading scientists and experts drawn from universities, outside the Government machine, who will have full responsibility for supervising and conducting the inquiry and who will publish the results. That is the minimum that we require.

It is surely somewhat ironic that it is the Australian Government who have appointed a Royal Commission. The Australian Government did not carry out the tests, nor do they have the great mass of information about the tests and the way in which they were conducted. Those matters are entirely the responsibility of the British Government. Instead of the Australian Government setting up the Royal Commission—I welcome that—it should be the British Government. I hope that the Government will look again at that.

In conclusion, many hon. Members are taking an increasing interest in this subject. On the basis of the information that is now coming out in Australia there are grounds, to put it mildly, for real concern. I hope that the Government will think again about the secrecy that they are still applying to the tests, which took place about 30 years ago. There is an overwhelming case for making all the information public and enabling us to have a proper independent appraisal of everything that happened in relation to the conduct of the tests.

10.18 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), on winning first place in what some would call the ballot but which I prefer to call the lottery. This is not a party-political issue. Therefore, I am disappointed at the

[Mr. Frank Cook]

attendance in the House tonight. I regret that one has to wait for the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill in order to discuss the issue at all.

We must recognise the loyalty and allegiance, good work and sterling service of the men and women who, some 30 or 35 years ago, served their country by willingly, but in ignorance, allowing themselves to be exposed to a form of experimentation which was quite unreal at the time. Most, but not all, of them were compelled to expose themselves to radiation without any form of protective equipment. Some of them merely wore a beret, pair of shorts and sandals. They followed an instruction to turn their backs to the explosion, which was *x* miles away and to cover their eyes. They were told that no harm would come to them. We are reliably informed that William Penney was advised to take out insurance to guard against future handicap. I have a file of documents with me that make that clear. Sadly, he is unable to remember such a reference, but we have evidence of it.

We cannot blame the scientists, because they could not know any more than they did at the time, and we have the benefit of hindsight. I have no vindictiveness in my heart. It is important that we realise that the scientists were exploring an element of creation, the depth and danger of which they did not realise. Thirty years after the explosion we must assess who bears the responsibility for it. That is why I strongly emphasise that this is not a party political issue.

It is incumbent upon every hon. Member to examine the population in his constituency, especially the majority of the population who, as the Prime Minister said, served their country, "well and truly". She said that their good and faithful service would never be forgotten. It is important that all hon. Members recognise that, because we must consider the matter without any form of party political bias or emphasis.

We now have a middle-aged element in society which is experiencing an inordinately high incidence of disability —not necessarily deformity—in themselves and in their offspring. I remember that the Minister asked how we could verify the statistics, and I shall come back to that. If disability is in one's offspring, one can expect to see further evidence of it in future generations.

This afternoon I heard of a man who, during his first marriage, had three deformed children. That is unusual, but not so unusual that one would justify it statistically by exposure to a nuclear test. However, he divorced, remarried and had a further two deformed offspring, both of whom were deformed in almost the same way. Again, that is statistically questionable. But when one pools the available evidence, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East referred—he demurred to the House because he did not wish to occupy too much of the time —there is a statistical overburden which is unquestionable, provided that one can gain access to the service and medical records of those males and females who were engaged in or exposed to the tests.

That is where I question not only this Government but previous Governments of all political persuasions. Not only has the provision of service and medical records been seriously hampered, but the records have been short of information. In addition, the service records have been carefully falsified. There are cases of entire ships' complements for which there is no record of their having been in the zone but whose members say that they took part in the preparation for or the clearing up of those operations.

Secrecy plays a major part in this matter. No one could argue tonight — the Minister least of all — thet those people do not deserve a fair deal. What we need in the Chamber tonight is the rare commodity of complete honesty among hon. Members of all parties. First, the service records of those people must be clearly outlined. We must obtain information about the medical treatment and examination that they received, and the locations of that medical treatment. We have evidence that many of them were shipped out to establishments run by other Governments. If that information is not provided, then, as the Minister said to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East, we have no means of checking the statistics. If we do not have a base from which to start, we cannot come to a reasonable conclusion.

Britain has legislation—the Crown Proceedings Act 1947—which precludes a member of the armed services from taking legislative action to seek reparation for negligence during his period of service to the Crown. That legislation was dreamed up at a time when we had no knowledge of such operations, and no idea that they might occur in future. In this discussion we are considering a legacy of something about which we could not have known. Will the Government consider amending the Crown Proceedings Act to take account of the almost anachronistic failure of the legislation to cater for the future not only of those who have given good service to the Crown but of their offspring and future generations? We are talking about the suffering, of which we were unaware 30 years ago, of youngsters who may not be allowed to have children and who may have deformities that are even worse than those of their parents or grandparents. We are talking about things about which a legislative body has never before been forced to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East referred to the Royal Commission which is coming here on 3 January. I would have hoped that the survey being conducted by the National Radiological Protection Board would, after all this time, have had some evidence to present, which would illuminate the British aspects of these tests. Sadly, it would appear from my examination of the NRPB survey that the movement of staff has been so grotesquely rapid that the whole team has changed from top to bottom at least once, if not twice. It is unfortunate that many questions that will be asked will be body-swerved on the basis that we have insufficient evidence.

We have so much evidence that it is important that it be examined in depth. A Royal Commission should have been set up, and it would have been welcomed. We must examine the matter more definitely. Ultimately, the people who were in the front line will die out the longer this goes on. We have a responsibility not only to them but to the generations after them.

I beg the Minister to listen carefully to what we say on behalf of the people who gave us such allegiance and loyalty. Will he give a commitment on behalf of the Government—because we now know facts that we did not before—that, in the words of the Prime Minister, he will listen to what has been said on behalf of those who served our country so well.

Nuclear Weapons (Tests)

10.32 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on securing this debate. I agree with some of what the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said that he was disappointed that there are so few hon. Members to listen to the debate. As he will recall, I initiated two previous debates on this subject, in July 1983 and March 1984, one of which took place at 4.31 am, and the other at 3.49 am, when there were about half the number of hon. Members who are present tonight. Statistically, that is an improvement, and I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind.

I think that the Minister will accept that this issue will not go away, even though some would suggest that our Government will procrastinate and draw the matter out. The Australian Government cannot be accused of that, and, acting as a stalking horse against our Government, they have ensured that this matter will run and run. Our Government have become rather besotted by the ludicrous new doctrine of inherited culpability. The Government worry too much about the sins of their forefathers. No one is accusing them of having been involved in the events 30 years ago. An all-party group is deeply interested in this subject, and the Government will know that the group thinks not that the Government were involved in the terrible events of those days but that they have done insufficient to make information available, and have tried to cover up for the sins of those who went before them.

I should like to contrast the approaches of the Australian and British Governments in dealing with this matter. First, I shall examine the remedies that are open to aggrieved service men and their families. The hon. Member for Stockton, North rightly referred to section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, with which the Minister will be familiar. When hon. Members have regularly suggested that that legislation should be amended to allow people in the position of these service men to sue the Government, the Ministry of Defence has always maintained that that would lead to a reduction in morale and discipline among our service men, and for that reason the Act could not be amended. I refute that idea. Although I accept that that legislation was introduced to cover the second world war and that in wartime it cannot be right that a Government should be expected to recompense the relatives of loved ones who are aggrieved because of injuries sustained, nevertheless, in peacetime different criteria apply.

It is ironic that in Australia service men who served cheek by jowl with our service men in those tests have had the right to take their Government to court, and in one case have gained redress in the courts, while our service men have been denied that privilege. that is ironic, especially in view of the dubious reason given, that that course would lead to some loss of morale or discipline among our men. It would therefore appear that the Australian Government have a far greater respect for the rights of their service men than we have for ours. I suggest that that fact points to the need for a bill of rights or at least the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in our statute books. If that were done, any Government who acted in this way would be in breach of their obligations.

The second contrast between the way in which the British and Australian Governments have tackled this problem concerns the availability of information. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said, the Australians have established a Royal Commission. It is ironic that we should have the same Queen but that different ground rules should apply. It is a paradox that the Australians should have established a Royal Commission but that what is good enough in Australia is not good enough here.

In Britain, secrecy is the order of the day, and that fact obviously points to the need in the dying moments of this year for freedom of information legislation. It is one of the tragedies of this year that we have not moved towards providing greater access to information for our citizens. Far too much of this country's business is done in a hole in a corner, and we are plagued far too much by the national obsession for and disease of secrecy, of keeping knowledge from people who have a right to know.

When the Minister intervened during the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and suggested that the hon. Gentleman should provide the statistics in this debate, that seemed to underline again the extraordinary fact that, because of the way in which the system works, the Opposition are denied access to the information that would have allowed them to answer such a question. The people are really asking only for the right to that information, so that they can come to the type of judgments which the Minister constantly tells them they should make. The Minister tells us that, statistically, what happens here is no worse than it would be for any other part of the population, and all the rest of it. We have heard those arguments repeated from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Butler: I do not believe that that charge can be made in this case. The hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) have studied this matter. The question I asked the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East involved how many people the hon. Gentleman thought were claiming that their present ill-health resulted from the tests. That information is not available to the Government, so it is not information that the Government can be accused of withholding.

Mr. Alton: When will that information be available? For 18 months, the Government have been giving us different figures. I suggested:

"The figures ranged from 13,500 to 20,000 people, and they were given in the space of only six months." — [*Official Report*, 12 March 1984; Vol. 56, c. 187.]

That was the answer given by the Prime Minister. Clearly, if the Government are not aware how many people will be surveyed and how many were involved in those tests, how can hon. Members expect to have any idea of what constitutes a reliable statistical sample or survey?

The third contrast that I should like to make between the way that the British and Australian Governments have handled the matter relates to the sense of urgency shown and the anger that people rightly feel about the issue. Since early October, the Australian Royal Commission has taken evidence from more than 100 veterans and scientists. As we have heard, it is to come to the United Kingdom in the new year to interview another 60 witnesses.

The Royal Commission was established after a Government report asserted that Australia had been kept in ignorance all along about the true nature of the British tests. Why, first having promised the full co-operation of Her Majesty's Government in the work of that

[Mr. Alton]

commission, did the Government decline to send anyone to put Britain's case until two week's ago? Why did that change of mind come about? Although I welcome it, I should like to know why, having first said that we would co-operate in the Royal Commission's work, we failed to send anyone, and why it took so long to change our minds.

Why did the Government deliberately frustrate the attempts of the veterans to gain legal aid in Australia by withholding information which is locked away in British archives?

The chairman of the commission, Mr. Justice James McClelland, has rebuked Britain over what he calls

"a rather unsatisfactory state of affairs. . . that there is ultimately a right of British veto."

He says:

"It is most desirable that we should not conduct this commission with our hands tied behind our back."

Although I know that 8,500 files have been released, many people in Australia claim that others are still held back. Can the Minister do anything tonight to allay the fears of the chairman of the commission and to refute his damning indictment?

Two incidents that have been revealed over the past few weeks show the Government's obsession with secrecy. After one of the Maralinga blasts in 1957, officials discovered an aboriginal family who said that they had camped in the bomb crater for two days and drunk water collected there. The family were given showers and sent back to the desert. John Hutton, an Australian service man, has told the commission that 200 soldiers were assembled later and told by a British officer that if anyone let out news of the incident to the media, he would be tried for treason. The men were allegedly reminded that under the Official Secrets Acts they could be shot by a firing squad or gaoled for 30 years if they talked about it. I should welcome the Minister's comments about those allegations.

I should like to draw to the attention of the Minister the remarks of Paul Malone, who works for *The Canberra Times* in the press gallery in Parliament House in Australia. I sent this document to the Minister's predecessor, the Minister for Information Technology, on 21 September 1984. In that document, Mr. Malone says:

"An examination of the documents written at the time of the tests reveals that many of the published official reports on the subject do not tell the whole truth. In fact in many cases the official reports are misleading. This particularly applies in relation to aboriginal presence in the region at the time of the tests. I have submitted pages of questions to the British High Commission here and have only just received a reply. Most of my questions have not been answered. Although the Commission has had the questions in writing for over six weeks, the response I received today to most questions was simply 'referred to London'."

When the Minister replied to that letter he went to great pains to say that, while he refuted many of Mr. Malone's allegations, he did not want to pre-empt the findings of the commission. It is amazing that information which might damage the Ministry of Defence is initially withheld. It is then released, sometimes grudgingly, to the Australian Royal Commission. Yet members of the press in Australia and here and Members of Parliament are denied access to the same information.

On another issue in the letter, the Minister says:

"Although I sympathise with the unfortunate people who are referred to in the newspaper article"—

in the *Sunday People*—

"the article is an example of mischievous reporting, which can only act to spread unnecessary concern among the many thousands of participants and their families involved in the tests."

Those articles referred to the genetic effects of the atomic tests on many of the children of service men who were involved in the tests, which were referred to by the hon. Member for Stockton, North.

I shall refer to three such cases this evening. The first is that of Ken Clarke of Wigan, Lancashire. He is 47 years of age. He was with the Royal Air Force on Christmas Island. He suffers from bronchitis but otherwise he is fairly fit. His son John, who is 25 years of age, has had problems with his knees since he was a teenager and has had two operations. His daughter, Janine, is 18 years of age. She has a disease affecting her hip joint and finds it difficult to walk. She says:

"The doctors do not even have a name for my condition."

Secondly, there is the case of Geoff Collins. He is aged 48 years and resides in Wallasey, Merseyside. He visited the Monte Bello islands during service as a Navy radio operator. His 20-year-old daughter has a badly deformed spine and shoulder blades and a congenital abscess of the middle ear, making her deaf. When she was born, doctors thought at first that she was a thalidomide victim, but her mother never took thalidomide. Geoff says:

"I have the nagging belief that my daughter has suffered because of the involvement with the tests."

The third case is that of Desmond Shaw, aged 50 years, of Liverpool, who was on Christmas Island. Five years after returning home he was struck down with an arthritic condition which his doctors were unable to diagnose accurately. He suffers still from this ailment. His daughter, Maria, was healthy at birth but at the age of one year she suddenly blacked out and has been mentally handicapped ever since. She is now 15 years of age and she attends a special school. Desmond's wife, Mary, says:

"No one knows what caused Maria's trouble. The doctors just shrug their shoulders and say, 'It is one of those things.'"

I have mentioned only three such cases, but the *Sunday People* has evidence that 57 children of British service men who were exposed to nuclear bomb tests have died, been hideously deformed or disabled or suffer crippling diseases. It makes the point in its article that there is no statistical evidence that these deaths, deformities, disablements or cripplings are greater per head of population than the deficiencies which occur in normal circumstances. However, there is a lingering doubt in the minds of many of the families involved. There is a belief among many of them that their children have suffered because of their parents' involvement in the Maralinga and Christmas Island tests. I should like to know from the Minister what he intends to do to ensure that a survey is conducted to determine what genetic effects there have been on the children of these service men.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has referred to the Minister's letter of 6 December. Part of the letter reads:

"All the evidence I have indicates that proper precautions were taken to safeguard the health and safety of those involved in the UK's atmospheric nuclear test programmes. It is important to note that the standards in use at that time were comparable with those of today."

If the right hon. Gentleman reads all the evidence that hon. Members have sent him and the two previous debates on this matter, he will find a document which his Department produced in 1953. The document gives the lie to the suggestion that service men were properly clothed or that proper precautions were taken. One paragraph

describes what the Army set out to do in the tests. It is a Ministry of Defence document which was top secret. It reads:

"The Army must discover the detailed effects of various types of explosion on equipment, stores and men with and without various types of protection."

So the men who were to be involved in the atomic explosions were to be exposed to the effects of radiation with and without protective clothing to discover what the effects would be on them. That gives the lie to the suggestion that adequate safety standards were set. It is rather reminiscent of all the bravado of the cold war years. It betrays an alarming ignorance of the effects of radiation in those early days.

The Minister says that it will be October 1986 before the survey by the National Radiological Board is completed. I believe that that is an unnecessarily long time to wait. Although I respect individual scientists who are working on the survey, I still believe that a body entirely independent of the Government should have undertaken the task. Service men and their families cannot understand why the survey is taking so long to complete. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what progress is being made.

In summary, I should like to make just five points. The survey should be expedited more quickly. Every assistance should be given to the Australian Royal Commission and our own should be established. All files and documents relating to that period should be released. The Crown Proceedings Act should be reviewed and amended to enable people to take the Ministry of Defence to court if they feel that they have suffered grievances as a result of those tests. Finally, a survey of the genetic effects of radiation on children of test blast victims must be urgently undertaken.

I am grateful for the debate, and to the Minister for being here to reply to the points that have been made.

10.50 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): This is a most opportune time for the debate. I am well aware of the situation and have read the debates that have taken place over the past year or so, but the reason why I describe the debate as opportune is that the attention of all those who are interested in the subject, and possibly of those who may not have been well acquainted with it in the past, will be concentrated somewhat more in the coming months when the Australian Royal Commission comes to London and goes about its business in the first few weeks of next year. The debate is opportune because it allows me to say one or two things that I have already said in different ways and about which I have written to Members of Parliament, in an attempt to present a fair and reasonable factual background to an issue that, frankly, is difficult, complex and, understandably, often emotional.

One has only to listen to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) refer to the cases of Mr. Clarke and Mr. Collins and their families and others, upon which I shall not comment — the House will understand why—and to details given in the debate and on other occasions, to appreciate even more the particular strains that those families are under. I say with the fullest possible sympathy that one fully understands why several of those who participated in the tests—who may or may not have been exposed to radiation, but believed that they were—and who suffer from cancer and cancer-related diseases attribute the incidence of those diseases to the fact that they participated in the tests. It is entirely understandable. In each and every one of those cases one difficulty is to establish whether that was so, but the greater difficulty is to persuade those concerned that it was not so.

I should like to take up a point made by at least two of the three people who spoke in the debate about the knowledge that existed at the time. For instance, the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said that we had not realised the great danger of radiation at that time. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill made a remark in similar vein. The fact is that when the first nuclear tests took place at Monte Bello in 1952, extensive knowledge of the effects of nuclear weapons was already in the possession of those responsible for the conduct of the tests. The preparations for the 1952 test and the recognition of the potential radiation hazards are clearly outlined in a report to the Chiefs of Staff meeting in September 1949. That was conveyed to the then Australian Prime Minister when his agreement for the tests was sought in 1951. Care and concern for the safety of the participants is apparent throughout the whole programme.

The effects of ionising radiation, far from having been discovered during the experimental period of the tests, had been known since the turn of the century. By the early 1950s when the tests started, permitted levels were internationally established at a point at which it was judged that the harm caused was acceptable in comparison with the other risks that we face every day of our working lives. The principle enshrined in modern radiological protection practice—as low as reasonably practicable—had not at that time been formulated in the precise terms that apply today, but it was a basic tenet that exposure to ionising radiation had to be kept to a minimum within permitted limits and consistent with the needs of the operation.

Against that background, I can say clearly that the limits set in the regulations that applied to the Hurricane operation in 1952 are comparable with those that apply today. Many of the distinguished scientists who helped to determine those limits for the United Kingdom test programme have since served on the International Commission for Radiological Protection and have therefore seen broadly the same standards developed in the early 1950s enshrined in the current commission's recommendations more than 30 years later.

Mr. Frank Cook: The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) referred to the following statement:

"The Army must discover the detailed effects of various types of explosion on equipment, stores and men, with and without various types of protection."

That is in a document marked "special circulation" and "top secret". It is dated 20 May 1953—four years after the date specified by the Minister.

Another top secret document——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make another speech.

Mr. Cook: I am not making a speech. I promise you, Mr. Speaker, that I am asking a question.

There is another top secret document, dated 2 January 1953. The Australian vessel HMS Hawkesbury had been in that area——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That does not sound like a question to me.

Mr. Cook: This is my question, Mr. Speaker. If the knowledge of the threat of radiation existed in 1949, as the Minister claims, why would certain areas of the Monte Bello islands remain from the January date until April and possibly longer still extremely dangerous so that everything had to be excluded? If all this was already known five years earlier, why should there be top secret documents about it?

Mr. Butler: I find it difficult to see how the hon. Gentleman's intervention relates to what I was saying.

Mr. Cook: It is a matter of logic.

Mr. Butler: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument, just as I allowed him to develop his. I shall some to the point raised by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, which has been dealt with many times before, but it was not immediately relevant to the point that I was making.

I was answering the assertion of the hon. Member for Stockton, North that we were, as it were, ignorant of the effects of radiation and thus finding our way during the course of the tests and that only today have the kind of limits been established that we consider to be safe for people such as radiation workers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that that was not the case. The knowledge went back a considerable number of years. On ionising radiation, it went back to the turn of the century. I believe that what I have said belies the claim that standards were lax at the time of the United Kingdom test and confirms that the international scientific view of the acceptability of the risks of exposure to ionising radiation has not altered despite the vastly greater body of data on its effects which has been collected and examined during the period since then. It is important to make that point first and foremost.

The next point that I must make is one that I emphasised in the note that I sent to all hon. Members. Frequently, when this matter is debated, one could form the impression that hundreds of people were exposed to massive doses of radiation that would not be acceptable today. I have described the limits in operation at the time, and the knowledge that existed, and have said that those limits were comparable with those of today.

Let us now consider the numbers who were exposed to radiation and the levels at which they were exposed. This part of my reply will inevitably be somewhat detailed. I hope that the House will bear with me while I try to set in context the levels of radiation to which people such as radiation workers may be exposed today compared with the levels of radiation to which those who participated in the tests were exposed.

I hope that the House will forgive me for reading this part of my speech. It may be helpful if the information is printed in *Hansard* and can be used as a record.

The current United Kingdom national limits for radiation workers are 30 milliSieverts per quarter, or an annual limit of 120 mSv, provided that the annual average dose from the age of 18 is less than 50 mSv. The international commission includes a single planned special exposure limit of 100 mSv provided that a limit of 250 mSv from such special exposures in the working life is not exceeded within the lifetime limit of 2,500 mSv. The current commission's recommendations set an annual average limit of 50 mSv.

As the House knows, about 20,000 people participated in the tests. Of those, 15,000 suffered no additional radiation exposure at all. There were some 6,000 recorded exposures associated with 5,000 individuals who experienced some radiation. Starting at the top of the scale, fewer than 30 experienced more than 70 mSv. In order not to take up too much time, I ask those who are interested to compare that figure with the figures that I have just given. There were fewer than 150 in the range between 20 and 70 mSv., and about 500 falling between 3·5 mSv. and 20 mSv. About 1,500 had measured exposures of less than 3·5 mSv. The remaining exposures, of which there were about 4,000, were not distinguishable from exposure to normal natural background radiation.

Participants aged about 60 will have received on average a dose from natural background radiation of about 150 mSv., or about 2·5 mSv. per annum. I understand that, within reasonable limits, a continuing dose of radiation at a low level, adding up to a certain figure, has approximately the same effect as a single high dose of that amount.

Even at the highest level, therefore, and for a very few people, the levels of radiation to which people were exposed were within the sort of levels that are acceptable today. For the vast majority, they were comparable with those that a normal person would receive during his life on this earth. The amount of radiation absorbed can vary by up to five times the average, depending on what part of the United Kingdom a person lives inland what type of house he lives in. The majority were exposed to limited levels. That must be important when we consider whether there was a risk.

We must also consider whether proper precautions were taken. I am aware as anyone else who has studied this subject of the anecdotal evidence about precautions not being followed properly. As far as I am aware, those claims have not been substantiated, or they have been based on a false understanding. I am persuaded by the evidence that I have seen, and from studying the matter as closely as I can, that precautions were adequate and observed. It is quite conceivable that, where there are human beings, errors can be made. I have no evidence of that, but it is therefore conceivable that some of the stories are based on fact. Even if there was some error, the amount of radiation to which those people would have been exposed would have been very small. The fewer than 30 people who were exposed to the higher levels were given specific tasks and knew that they would be exposed to high levels. If errors occurred, the chances of people being damaged are minimal.

How, then, do we attempt to prove whether I am right? That must be done in a statistical exercise. That is why the survey has been set up. It is unreasonable to charge the National Radiological Protection Board with any bias or with any lack of independence of mind when tackling its work. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said that information would be supplied by the Ministry of Defence. That is necessary because it has the records, but the board has made it clear that it will validate all information given to it before undertaking its work. The Ministry does not and will not dictate how the board undertakes that work. I cannot think of a better body to do the work. It is highly competent and has a great deal of experience. We do no service to our search for the truth by suggesting that the board's work will be other than comprehensive and unbiased.

I was asked whether the board was tackling the problem with a sense of urgency. When I took on my new responsibilities and discovered that the board's report would not be available until the autumn of 1986, I reacted as would have anyone else. I made special inquiries to discover whether there was any way in which to accelerate its work. I was told that, if the exercise was to be done properly, it would take that time. The report is statistical and objective. That is its importance as compared with the work of the Royal Commission. In no way am I suggesting that the Royal Commission was not objective, but a statistical exercise is, by definition, objective.

There will be a need to demonstrate that the control group or groups have suffered a different health experience from the participants. If 300 service men have experienced cancer and similar diseases as a result of the tests, the statistical analysis will show a higher incidence of cancer among participants than the norm. That must be so statistically. As I have said previously, if that is so the Government will have to change their stance.

The important thing is that by carrying out this exercise, and not through listening to the evidence of individuals, we shall be able to establish that first important point. I do not propose to consider a Royal Commission until the findings of that board are known. Only if they show a difference in experience between the control group and participants will the Government reconsider their position to see what the next step should be.

Mr. Alton: If this is to be a survey of only 20,000 people—a relatively small number—why will it take until October 1986 for it to be completed?

Mr. Butler: The board will undoubtedly read this debate, and it will note the urgency that the House, like the Government, places on the need for early publication of its report. My Department has been told that the work is of such a nature—and this is a highly complex matter —as to take this length of time. No one would be gladder than I if it could report earlier.

The Government were criticised for taking a different line from the Australian Government. I refute absolutely that we are going about our work in the wrong way. It is, however, correct that the Australian Government have set up a commission which, in the relatively near future, will be taking evidence in London.

This is an Australian Royal Commission, set up primarily to inquire into safety precautions and the possible effects of the tests on the health of Australians. Naturally, when the Australian Prime Minister requested United Kingdom co-operation in providing relevant information to the commission, the Government's response was to assure full co-operation within the constraints imposed on them on the grounds of national security or international obligations.

Already, literally hundreds—possibly thousands—of documents have been made available. With the exception of classified material, all information which is being made available to the commission will be made available in the Public Records Office. Special arrangements have been made with the Royal Commission that any relevant material which must remain classified is available to it.

It is not the Government's normal policy to release official documentation before the 30-year time period prescribed by the Public Records Act 1958. The decision to do so in this case is a reflection of our willingness to co-operate fully with the Australian authorities. I therefore refute the suggestion that our co-operation has in any sense been lukewarm or half-hearted.

It is correct that in the early days we decided not to be represented by counsel in Australia. That is very different from giving evidence. We have now decided to be so represented. With the advent in London of the commission, I believe that counsel will be helpful. It is necessary that evidence, based as much on fact and recorded experience as possible, is put before the commission. The evidence that the Government give will generally be presented by those who took part in the tests —for example, by Scientists, who have a full record of their experience. That evidence will be laid before the commission to enable it not to seek to pass judgment on the British Government—that is not the purpose of the commission—but to enable it to establish the factual background to its investigations into the circumstances of the test and the possible implications for the health of Australians.

To illustrate the contact and co-operation that exists, the terms and conditions under which the commission will operate in the United Kingdom have been agreed between myself and Senator Evans, who is the new Australian Minister for Resources and Energy. We wish the commission well in its work.

I end with the assertion that I have made on previous occasions. I have confidence that the safety precautions in the tests were more than adequate to ensure that nobody should have suffered harm from the effects of ionising radiation from the United Kingdom test programme. As for the possibility of its effects on United Kingdom participants, we have set up the NRPB study. That will demonstrate whether their health has been adversely affected by their presence. I can assure the House that I have to retain, and that I do retain, an open mind on that matter against the reports of the board.

Regional Development

11.16 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry came before the House on 28 November to announce his revised regional areas and regional development aid policy, he dealt a very cruel blow to a part of my constituency which suffers from very high unemployment. I was not the only hon. Member who had cause for concern and sorrow on that occasion. Many hon. Members rose to criticise the map which had been drawn while other hon. Members rose to praise it, including a number of hon. Members with constituencies in the west midlands. I described it then as a slapdash map drawn by somebody sitting behind a desk in London. I stand by that criticism. It applies not only to my constituency but to others. There may be other hon. Members who wish to speak in order to underline that point in relation to other areas. However, one factor that made that map more slapdash than it needed to be was the use of travel-to-work areas as a building block or as a unit by which to define the areas in which regional aid was to be concentrated.

The objective of the policy was that regional aid should be concentrated on those areas which most needed it. That is a laudable objective which I share entirely but which I contend was not satisfied by the way the map was drawn in relation to my own and certain other areas. The travel-to-work areas were controversial and contentious. They had been drawn up only a few months previously, in the face of very intense argument. The local authorities in my constituency and I protested at the way in which those areas were being drawn and the consequences which would follow. We saw that the next step would be that the redefined travel-to-work area would be regarded as having an overall lower level of unemployment and therefore would not qualify for aid.

On the day of the announcement the Minister tried to defend those new travel-to-work areas. He indicated that statistically they were fine because they included 70 per cent. of the people living in the area who travelled to work in it. If, however, the whole country were taken as a single travel-to-work area, it would satisfy the statistical criteria. If half the country were take as a single travel-to-work area it would satisfy the statistical criteria. In my own constituency, an area of hundreds of square miles has been taken as a travel-to-work area and, by what was a very shabby trick, an attempt has been made to conceal the unemployment problem in one community. I shall return later to that point in more detail. That is the fundamental error.

The determination of regional boundaries need not have had such a devastating effect. It was open to Ministers not to use the travel-to-work area as the definition of an area. In Manchester, the Government used ward boundaries and, under the order, that could have been done in other parts of the country where the travel-to-work area was such an unsatisfactory guide. The fact that the Government could vary the pattern only in Manchester shows that they had not adopted a flexible approach to areas of the country that most needed it.

The Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is to reply to the debate, knows the circumstances, because the local authorities and I corresponded with him during the summer and he kindly saw a deputation of councillors from all the political parties in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman listened carefully, before the announcement was made, to a strongly pressed case. Yet that absurd announcement, which will have drastic effects on the community of Amble in my constituency, was still made. The Government got it wrong. They should admit that, and try to do something to put it right.

What sort of area is regional aid designed to help? I suggest that it is the sort of area where one in three adults has no job, over 80 per cent. of council tenants receive housing benefit, over 45 per cent. of owner-occupiers receive rent rebate, fewer than 50 per cent. of families own a car, about 25 per cent. of the children get free school meals, there has been a substantial reduction in employment in the coal industry and where, to take some of the wider social criteria, only 18 per cent. of children stay on at school after 16—compared with 57 per cent. in other parts of the county of Northumberland that are within the development area and are treated as being in greater need than Amble.

The general unemployment and social situation in Amble has been made much worse. For example, 150 men have been put on the dole since the Government's announcement because of redundancies in opencast coal mining. It is estimated that there will be about 470 redundancies in that industry by 1992. There is a steady rundown in employment, which is the natural consequence of sites being worked out.

Earlier this week, I tabled a written question to the Secretary of State for Energy about the rundown in opencast coal mining. The reply illustrated how out of touch the Government are. I asked what discussions the right hon. Gentleman had had with representatives of opencast workers about the redundant mineworkers payments scheme. Opencast workers do not benefit from the scheme. I was amazed to read the reply of the Under-Secretary of State for Energy, who said:

"my right hon. Friend has pointed out that the prospects for opencast mining appear to be good and unlikely to give rise to large-scale redundancies consequent upon restructuring." — [*Official Report*, 17 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 26-27.]

That was a week or so after the announcement of 150 redundancies and at the beginning of a period in which we expect many more.

The largest employer in Amble is the building trade. Where will that be left by the Government's recent announcement that local councils cannot use money that they have saved for house building and improvement grants? That will be yet another blow to the biggest employer in Amble. The prospects of an upturn for that trade have been effectively destroyed by yesterday's announcement, which was so vigorously challenged by Conservative Members when the statement was made and in today's debate.

The Government have added further blows since the regional development announcement. Last week, they closed the Amble training workshop, which operates under the special programmes. Without warning, consultation or discussions, we learnt a week or 10 days ago that the Government had suddenly closed the workshop which gives youngsters, some of whom have difficulty in fitting into normal employment, a chance of training. The workshop was closed and the staff were made redundant. Within that same period, the hours of the jobcentre have been cut to a minimum. The jobcentre was to be closed

in an area with very high unemployment. We have now got it open for two half days a week, but I remind hon. Members that unemployment is way above the national average in that area.

This year, 163 pupils left Coquet high school in Amble. Of those, 143 are still looking for jobs, including 80 on Government programmes. I do not think that it was ever envisaged that the Government programmes would have to take well over half the number of school leavers, or that so huge a proportion of them — nearly all of them — would be out of a job by this stage in the year. *[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) is saying from a sedentary position, the nearest skillcentre, Killingworth, is also closing. It is not very near, but it is the nearest, and the only one that we have got.

Coquet high school's headmaster has made some despairing comments about the problem. He said:

"A considerable emphasis in this school is given to those activities which will equip young people with skills which employers will value, such as technological awareness. . . . To diminish opportunities further would intensify the frustration, bitterness and anger which is evident among many young people who already feel that society is treating them with a lack of concern verging on contempt."

That is not an unrealistic comment when 143 out of 163 school leavers have no job. On every count Amble has an overwhelming case. So why is it being given the cold shoulder? The Government's excuse is that the new travel-to-work area that they have drawn up does not have high enough unemployment to justify special aid. They have pushed Amble into a huge area covering hundreds of square miles in the hope of concealing its problems. Of course, I and the local authorities protested vigorously about that at the time. But the Government's trick has not worked, because unemployment is now higher in the Alnwick and Amble total travel-to-work area than it is in the neighbouring Ashington and Morpeth area, which gets the full development treatment.

Unemployment is now higher even in the whole travel-to-work area than in the development area. On the November figures there is 16·3 per cent. adult unemployment in the whole travel-to-work area, as against 16 per cent. in the neighbouring area, which qualified for full development aid. Indeed, that is leaving on one side the fact that within the Amble employment exchange area unemployment stands, I believe, at about 33 per cent, or higher.

Even in the whole Alnwick and Amble travel-to-work area, unemployment is much higher than in relatively prosperous communities, such as Ponteland, which is also in the development area. Those who are not from the north-east will not realise that in mentioning Ponteland and Darras Hall I am talking about Newcastle's most favoured and affluent suburb. It is a very attractive area, much favoured by executives for housing purposes. House prices are high and it is very popular. It simply does not have the problems of a place such as Amble, yet it gets the full benefit of development area status. There is no logic in that.

The real unemployment figure for the Amble employment exchange area is at least one in three, and that amply justifies giving that area a status that is even above that of development status now being offered by the Government. It deserves even more help than that. We are already feeling the effects of the Government's callous decision. One firm that was set up in an advance factory in Amble has now moved to the Tyneside area, where grants are available. The firm T. A. C. Display, which started in small premises in Amble and was helped by the council, took on an advance factory of 5,000 sq ft, took an option on another 5,000 sq ft factory to expand, but has now uprooted and gone to the development area where the grants are.

Other employers in Amble are worried about their position and wonder what their future will be. A very successful firm in the area, Phoenix Mountaineering Ltd, says:

"When we look around at the inducements offered by other places, it makes us wonder if we made the right decision to come to Amble in the first place."

Peter Cutts, a director of P. E. C. Furniture Ltd, says:

"If we were in the same position now as in 1974, we would probably never have come to Amble from Bedlington".

Bedlington is in the development area.

The managing director of L. Animation, another local firm, says:

"Amble is suffering particularly today and will never recover unless measures are introduced which will positively discriminate in its favour."

So many of the existing employers are worried.

How shall we persuade new employers to come to the area when down the road they can get substantially greater benefits in areas where unemployment is not as bad as it is in Amble?

An even more serious problem arises from the Government's decision. It is the exclusion of the area from EEC regional development aid. The firms and local authorities in my constituency are more worried about that than about the loss of limited assistance which will now flow to places in development areas under the Government's policies. They are worried that the European door is now being slammed on them.

That is in a situation where the local authorities have tried their best to mount projects to build up the infrastructure in the area seeking European and national aid. The local authorities in the area have undertaken a number of projects—a 48-acre industrial estate; a new electricity substation; a purpose-built workshop let to a successful manufacturer; the conversion of redundant lock-up garages to form five nursery units for small workshops, which was undertaken in partnership with the Development Commission; the reconstruction of the north and south breakwaters in the harbour; the construction of a major new distributor road to open up land for private sector housing; a running track and sports centre at the new high school; and the county has plans to improve roads into Amble. Such work will be frustrated in future if we have no access to the European aid and help which is available for such projects.

The local authority now wants to engage in other projects. One is for a marina, on which the local authority is working hard. Amble is increasingly popular as a sailing centre. It may be that we can get some of that project in before the axe falls and before the closing date. Local authority officers are working hard to do it, but, if they are not successful, that project, too, will fail to get the European aid that might be available. Road works are still essential to improve communications to the industrial sites in the area. Tourist projects could be undertaken in the area and EEC financial assistance could be obtained for firms.

Infrastructure work would help the fishing industry. Although we shall not lose access to FEOGA grants as a result of this decision, other works which could be of real

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

help to the fishing industry and fish marketing in the area depend on European regional fund aid, which will no longer be available to us.

When the Government put forward their case, they come back again and again to the travel-to-work area issue. I had an oral question today, which was not reached and was therefore answered in written form by the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, asking him again why Amble had been excluded. He said:

"Amble is part of the Alnwick and Amble travel-to-work area. That area certainly has an unemployment rate which is above the national average but that is true of many areas which are not included in the new assisted areas map . . . On the overall criteria used for making comparisons with the country generally, the Alnwick and Amble travel-to-work area did not justify assisted area status."

That is no longer true, for the reason that I gave earlier. The travel-to-work area has a higher unemployment rate than the area within the development area. Even more significantly, the travel-to-work area conceals the reality that the level of unemployment in the Amble employment exchange area is so high by any calculation that it fully justifies the inclusion of that employment exchange area within a development area. I ask the Minister to accept that.

I want to make two proposals to the Government. The first is the simple, straightforward and only answer for a Government who got it wrong the first time. They should redraw the map and put the Amble employment exchange area into the development area where it should be. That solution relies on the method the Government used in the case of Manchester, not to rely on the travel-to-work area, and it is the obvious answer.

If the Government are not prepared to do that—I cannot understand why they should not—they should consider one other proposal to avoid the consequences of this appalling misjudgment. The Government could ensure that Amble remains eligible for European regional development aid by classifying the rural development area, of which it is part, as an assisted area for EC regional fund purposes. Rural development areas are established by the Development Commission, which is the governing body and gives a great deal of help to my constituency and other rural areas, mainly those with a small population. Therefore, they are Government assisted areas and should qualify for European regional development aid. If the Government were prepared to fight this battle and win the argument, they would bring the benefits of EC regional aid to rural assisted areas that they have omitted from their development areas. I emphasise that second possibility because it could be a powerful help in solving Amble's problems.

If the Government do nothing, they will be condemning one of our hardest hit areas to struggle against impossible odds, and bribing employers to go to far more prosperous areas. Amble is one of the hardest hit communities. The Government have done it a terrible disservice by their decision. It is not too late for them to put it right.

11.35 pm

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). We represent almost the two extremes in England, in that there are only two constituencies beyond mine and none beyond his. However, my argument is similar to his. I wish to argue about the review, which is based purely and simply on travel-to-work areas and which ignores the reality of areas.

According to the statistics for November 1984, my dearly beloved county of Cornwall has 21·2 per cent. male unemployment and 15·8 per cent. female unemployment. Cornwall would qualify as a travel-to-work area on the basic definition of 70 per cent. going to work within the area. Indeed, the figure must be about 98 per cent. If Cornwall had been one travel-to-work area, the entire county would have received development assistance. However, one third of it is omitted. There are the travel-to-work areas of St. Austell and Truro, both of which are in my constituency, and of Launceston, which is not but which is part of my county.

The reason for that is easy to see. If one examines the crude unemployment figures for those areas, one sees that the figures are 14·4 per cent. for St. Austell, 12·2 per cent. for Truro, and 13·9 per cent. for Launceston. I recognise that they are lower than in the rest of the county. These are small oases of prosperity in the middle of a county that suffers from endemic unemployment and a low wage structure.

The brief provided by the Library puts travel-to-work areas in order of levels of unemployment. It shows how bad the general position is in my county. We have the highest level of unemployment in Great Britain. In Newquay, unemployment is 29 per cent. In this sad league, Falmouth comes 13th, Helston 14th, Penzance and St. Ives 15th, and Redruth 35th. We have five entries in the worst 35 in the country, and there are 322 teams in that league of agony.

Liverpool comes 28th in the league. No hon. Member believes that Liverpool deserves anything other than all the financial assistance that any Government may feel inclined to give for regional development. Indeed, many hon. Members would argue that it needs even more than that. Although Cornwall has four entries above Liverpool, it matters not one iota. The little cases of prosperity within my great county, which is about 100 miles long, have been left out. The position is even worse than that. The crude unemployment figures in my county are totally meaningless.

The Minister may have had drawn to his attention a question that I asked in January this year. It was an unusual question, in that, instead of asking the Minister to list the number of women unemployed in named travel-to-work areas, I asked whether, relative to the most recent census, the Minister could list, for each county in Great Britain, the number of women aged between 25 and 54 who were in paid employment. One would have thought that the number of women employed would have related in some way to the number unemployed, but that is far from being so. The answer revealed that only 46·1 per cent. of women in my county are employed. That is the lowest for Great Britain; it is lower than Merseyside, the Western Isles, the west midlands, the north-east, the north-west and certainly the south-east. Yet the unemployment figures suggest that female unemployment in Cornwall is not significantly worse than that in the rest of Great Britain. The figures showed that 46 per cent. of women in Cornwall worked, compared with 56 per cent. in Merseyside, 58 per cent. in the west midlands, and more than 62 per cent. in London. The figures are meaningless, yet that is what the analysis has been based upon.

My second reason is the general lack of prosperity in the county. Those of us who know the area, and who were born and brought up there, are often shocked by the prosperity of the south-east. But it is difficult to produce figures to demonstrate that air of poverty. The only statistic that we can use is the new earnings survey, which states that, for men aged more than 21, the average wage in England is £168·10. In Cornwall, it is £138·80. Again, that is the lowest in Great Britain. It is lower than on Merseyside, in the west midlands, the east midlands, the lowlands of Scotland, Glasgow and Liverpool. That figure is not something new, as the Minister would know if he examined the figures. Sadly, that has been the position for a long time. Yet that little oasis in the middle of Cornwall, in which by Cornish standards there is some sign of prosperity, has been left out and will receive no assistance. The average wages in Warwickshire and Merseyside respectively are £157 and £161.

What will be the effects of the Government's decision? One case that I plead, although the area is not in my constituency—this is more a countywide matter than a constituency one—is the development area of United Downs, of which I am sure no Minister has heard. It is at the centre of what used to be the mining area of Cornwall. A few years ago, Carrick district council decided, adventurously, at considerable expense—the irony is that it received some assistance from the Government—to fill in the mine shafts and try to reclaim that industrial desert, which is all that it can be called. United Downs is just four miles from Camborne, five miles from Redruth, and six or seven miles from Falmouth, which are in the top 35 travel-to-work areas in Great Britain in terms of unemployment. But sadly for United Downs—such is the way these things work—it is not in the Camborne travel-to-work area, to which it is closer physically but in the Truro travel-to-work area. Therefore, it has been completely cut off from assistance.

Given the Government's enthusiasm for travel-to-work areas, is there some way in which United Downs can be transferred from the Truro travel-to-work area to Camborne or Redruth? I should repeat that, although United Downs is not in my constituency, I consider the matter to be so outrageous that I must draw it to the hon. Gentleman's attention. The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Mudd)—this is not a party political point in my county—has tried to draw it to the Minister's attention, but I am using this opportunity to emphasise the lunacy of the decision. This is a blow to United Downs and to the Truro area as a whole. More than that, it is a blow to the St. Austell area. Truro is not an industrial town. The largest manufacturer there is Furniss biscuits. The biscuits are magnificent, should be tried by every hon. Member and make an extremely good Christmas present, should anybody want one. The last time that I checked, the firm employed fewer than 30 people, and as that is the biggest manufacturer in Truro, that shows that the loss of the status is not too important for that city.

However, for St. Austell, the loss is important because it is an industrial town. It is dominated by the china clay industry, which fortunately is extremely industrious and profitable. However, because of mechanisation and technology, the number of people that it employs is never likely to exceed the present number, and St. Austell recognises that. For a long time, it has been trying desperately to build an alternative industrial base.

Today, I had a letter inviting me to open a new factory site, which has come about as a result of the generous co-operation of local authorities and various Government agencies. Now, that factory site will receive no financial assistance. There is a feeling that the whole effort has been killed stone dead. How can somebody persuade a manufacturer to come to Cornwall, 300 miles from the centre of our commerce, when there are areas receiving the same assistance that are within seven, six or five miles, or even half a mile?

We realise that our Government's assistance is limited, so one of the chief worries, as my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, is that we have lost access to Euro-money. The most important aspect of that for us is water money. For a while, it has been easier to get money from the European Community to help the water infrastructure in my county than it has been to get water from the reservoirs. I am sure that the Minister will recognise that to cut one third of my county off from the Euro-loans that have been giving it some hope for the rebuilding of its water and sewerage system is a sad blow.

The reality of what has happened—I can hardly believe it—is that the county with the fewest women in employment in Great Britain, with over 20 per cent. of its male population unemployed and with the lowest wage rate in Great Britain has lost development status for a third of its area. That is amazing and people in the county find it so. The more one studies this review, the more one feels that a group of fifth formers could have done a rather better job if they had spent a whole afternoon on it, using the available statistics in the Library, let alone what may be available to the Department. This is the most childlike response to the problem.

The Government cannot say that they did not know all the facts that I have set out, because the submission by the Cornwall county council includes them all. Therefore, there are two possibilities. One is that the submission simply was not read, studied, checked and thought through. The second is that all the figures were brought to the attention of the Minister, but then they were ignored, and it was decided that the only thing that counted was the travel-to-work area, and that the bare statistics available to the Government were all that mattered. I do not know which is the most charitable assumption to make—that the facts were not read or that that the Department chose to ignore the reality. However, there is enormous dissatisfaction in my county about what has happened.

I emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. Is it possible for us to have access to European money through the rural designation? That would not solve all the problem, but it would help a large proportion of it. I look forward to detailed answers on those observations, if not now, then in correspondence.

I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State will not be surprised to hear that there is a wish for a delegation to come up from the west country to discuss these points with the hon. Gentleman face to face. The figures are known to the Under-Secretary of State, and he has received the county's submission. He has heard that my county was rejected. All he has to do is go to the files and open them at the right page, and he will be able to relate the rational, humane, sensible arguments that persuaded the Government to take this decision.

The Under-Secretary of State can give a detailed answer tonight, because the review took a year to

[Mr. David Penhaligon]

complete, and the arguments and reasons must be available. I suspect that the best I can hope for is a letter arguing the points and the reception of a delegation from my county. We shall certainly look forward to that delegation. I look forward also to hearing the comments by the Under-Secretary of State.

11.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. David Trippier): I congratulate the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on his continuing and uncanny luck in the ballots. On 7 December, the hon. Gentleman tabled a private Member's motion. That motion was drawn third, and, unfortunately, it did not reach a debate. Only 12 days later, he has repeated that remarkable feat.

Mr. Penhaligon: The Lord is on our side.

Mr. Trippier: In the spirit of charity, and as this is the season of good will, I am anxious to extend my congratulations to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and to make it clear that his feat was remarkable.

I welcome the opportunity to explain to the House, and especially to the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed and for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon), the basis of the new assisted area map. I recognise from their speeches — because the hon. Gentlemen are vociferous on behalf of their constituents, we are accustomed to hearing such statements — that they are upset about the recent announcement. Obviously, it is impossible, when dealing with regional policy, to please everyone. Sometimes I wonder, because I have had such a close involvement in this matter, whether one makes as many enemies as friends.

This opportunity to explain the basis of the new assisted areas map is welcome, because misunderstanding is rife. Whether the misunderstanding is genuine or wilful is immaterial, as, in the confusion that abounds, many seem to have come to believe that the new map is biased — although which way it is thought to be biased is never made clear. Certainly the bias is not in favour of this Administration. Thirty-two travel-to-work areas which were formerly assisted areas are excluded from the new map. The exclusions affect 41 hon. Members, and, of those 32 are Conservative Members.

Leaving aside the question of bias, how much of the country has been affected? The travel-to-work areas which were previously assisted but which no longer justify preferential treatment over the rest of the country cover less than 3 per cent. of the working population. By contrast, travel-to-work areas covering more than 10 per cent. of the working population have been brought into the new map. In fact, there has been a major increase in the coverage of the assisted areas map — an increase made possible by the support available from the European regional development fund.

The assisted areas map sets the geographical limits of our regional industrial policy. As we said in our White Paper "Regional Industrial Development", published a year ago, the aim of regional industrial policy is the reduction of regional imbalances in employment opportunities on a stable long-term basis. In that White Paper we noted that relative annual average unemployment rates had previously been the dominant factor in previous drawings of the asssited areas map. We recognised that there would be merit — we made this clear in the White Paper — in taking a more measured account of other factors, such as industrial infrastructure, an overdependence on traditionl industry, peripherality, occupational structure and other available forms of assistance.

Despite the arguments of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, we did not declare that the policy would concentrate aid on areas suffering the highest levels of long-term unemployment. However, we invited views on the criteria to which we had referred in the White Paper, and received them in more than 300 of the submissions that were sent to my Department. The support for continuing to have unemployment as the main criterion was overwhelming. Those arguing that long-term unemployment was an appropriate additional factor amounted to 18 per cent. — fewer than those who argued in favour of industrial structure or peripherality.

Taking account of those submissions, and strictly in accordance with the aims of the policy, our decisions on the map were based solely on areas' relative need for current and future employment opportunities. The main criterion was relative annual average unemployment rates. Relative long-term unemployment was also taken into account, although it should be noted that this is highly correlated to current unemployment. The coefficient of correlation is 0·92 per cent.

In making our decisions on the map, we also took account of factors such as, first, the relative pressures for new job opportunities expected to result from the varying age structure of the population in different parts of the country; and we also recognised that this may be affected by changes in local economic activity rates; secondly, areas' differing industrial structure and how this may put present employment at risk; thirdly, the occupations and skills of the population as they reflect the quality of local employment opportunities and the pool of entrepreneurial talent,; and fourthly, handicaps to economic recovery, such as great distances from main markets and peripherality and the general trend of industry to move out of the densely populated inner cities.

All those factors are objective criteria, but their relative importance is essentially subjective. We considered in great depth the scope for using a synthetic index, but concluded that no single index was capable of reflecting adequately the relative needs of areas, especially as account also needed to be taken of the relative positions of neighbouring areas.

Within travel-to-work areas there can be wide variations. I take and am fully aware of the point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. It may interest the hon. Gentleman to know that I took part in downgrading four towns in my constituency. That is courage. One town has unemployment far higher than the area that he has been describing.

I understand that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed questions the use of travel-to-work areas as the building blocks for the assisted areas map. The building blocks used by successive Governments have been travel-to-work areas. I can assure the hon. Member that it is not for convenence that we use travel-to-work areas — far from it. People do not observe administrative boundaries when looking for or travelling to work. Therefore, it would

not be sensible, and certainly it would not be cost-effective, for regional industrial policy to be based on administrative boundaries.

Successive Governments have used travel-to-work areas as the building blocks for their assisted areas map. We consider them to be the best basis as they are the closest available approximations to self-contained labour markets covering the whole country. For areas that fall well short of being self-contained, the relationship between unemployment and job opportunities is greatly affected by the situation in adjoining areas—too greatly for such areas to be useful as the basis for a cost-effective regional industrial policy aimed at reducing the disparities in levels of unemployment to which I referred before.

Furthermore, TTWAs are the smallest units for which nationally comparable unemployment rates are available. These unemployment rates are calculated for an area by dividing the number of unemployed who live there by the sum of the employees who work there and the number of unemployed who live there. This rate could be misleading for areas with a substantial commuting inflow or outflow. For example, for an inner city with a substantial commuting inflow, the rate would be artifically deflated by the many non-residents working there. Numbers of unemployed are known for various other areas right down to wards, but the ratio of unemployed to total residents does not give nationally comparable figures when calculated for areas that do not take into account normal commuting patterns. Such ratios are useful as indicators of social conditions in an area and how these are changing.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister know the current unemployment rate for the Amble employment exchange area?

Mr. Trippier: Yes. The hon. Gentleman has referred to it this evening. He referred to it also when he brought his delegation to see me. I emphasise once more that there is a town within my constituency where unemployment is far higher than in the Amble employment exchange area, and it is just as widespread geographically as the area in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Travel-to-work areas have to cover a self-contained labour market area. The hon. Gentleman is known to be a fair man, and I am sure that he will accept that there will be critics of whatever assisted area map the Government produce and of whatever criteria we use. Those who fall below the line, as it were, will be dissatisfied and critical of any system, whereas those who are above the line, as the hon. Gentleman was with his constituency prior to the recent review, are well satisfied. As a result of the recent review, the coverage of the map throughout the United Kingdom is far greater than it was.

Regional industrial policy is about employment opportunities, and the unemployment data for the assisted areas map should be the best available measures of the local mismatch between labour supply and demand. In practice, it is not possible to divide the country into entirely separate labour market areas such that no one commutes across the boundaries of those areas. The Department's travel-to-work areas are the best approximation to such areas which cover the whole country.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has referred to variations within travel-to-work areas. It would be surprising if they were homogenous. Our policy is based on the full recognition that any increase in jobs in a depressed area is likely to be taken up by residents of nearby prosperous areas. Regional industrial policy is not an appropriate instrument for tackling the problems of unemployment black spots. To be cost-effective, regional industrial policy needs to take account of the need for further employment opportunities across the area in which it is most likely that any new jobs will go to its residents.

The preparation of the new travel-to-work areas used 1981 census data so as to be as statistically valid as possible within England, Scotland and Wales. The basic criteria used were that at least three quarters of each area's residents should work in the area and that at least three quarters of the jobs in the area be taken by its residents, with slightly lower rates of self-containment being accepted for large areas.

The hon. Member has stated his belief — this followed the statement of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry — that the travel-to-work areas were drawn up in a slapdash manner "by somebody sitting behind a desk in London". — [*Official Report*, 28 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 940.] Nothing could be further from the truth, and I shall explain why. The travel-to-work area boundaries were first drafted by the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies at Newcastle university, which may surprise the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. Those sitting behind their desks in London then sought the advice of those with local knowledge, particularly on any recent local developments that could have led to changes in travel patterns since the census. I am sure that that point will be of great interest to the hon. Member for Truro.

The time available for comments was limited as we wanted the new travel-to-work area boundaries for the new map of assisted areas so that we could end as soon as possible the uncertainty that precedes change. However, I understand that many useful and detailed comments were received and that all the new information was assessed alongside the census data to see whether the changes were on a scale to warrant modification of the draft boundaries; and in several cases changes were made in the light of that new information.

I understand also that many suggestions were made for alternative areas, which were assessed against the self-containment criteria, and that changes were made to follow district boundaries more closely where that could be done without affecting the validity of the travel-to-work areas. I fully appreciate the concern of hon. Members whose constituencies are no longer included in the map of assisted areas.

Mr. Beith: Does the Minister recognise how far all that verbiage is from the reality of the travel-to-work area that we are talking about — Alnwick and Amble? It is 50 miles across, and there is no public transport across it. More people commute to jobs over the boundary immediately to the south of Amble between Amble and the development area than commute across that enormous travel-to-work area.

Mr. Trippier: I am afraid that that applies in many other areas that have been covered by the boundary drawn under the travel-to-work area map. The hon. Gentleman is rehearsing the points that he put fairly to me when he came to see me with the delegation. I emphasised then, and I repeat, that the responsibility for the new travel-to-work area map is in fact not that of the Department of Trade and Industry. The hon. Gentleman knows that full

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well. We were waiting for the map to come from the Department of Employment, which was responsible for drawing it up. I am only sorry that the map took so long, although the census was taken in 1981. None the less, we had already committed ourselves to working on the travel-to-work area map, and, as I have already mentioned, it says so in the White Paper that we published 12 months ago.

I fully understand the concern expressed by, the hon. Members for Truro and for Berwick-upon-Tweed. I can assure them that we looked carefully at all such areas' cases for assistance to see whether they merited continued preferential treatment over the rest of the country. But, even with the substantially wider coverage of the new map, we could not justify continuing to assist all the areas that have benefited in the past.

However, we have brought in generous transitional provisions to ease the downgrading, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was kind enough to mention. In particular, all applications for regional selective assistance received before the change will be negotiated on the basis of the old map for a further four months. Also, the European Commission will continue to accept applications for the European regional development fund quota section until March next year. I understand exactly what the hon. Gentleman means when he says that his local authority's officers are working hard to make sure that their application is in time.

Mr. Penhaligon: The Minister has explained the situation, and it is interesting to hear about the decisions that have been made, but was attention paid to the fact that few women in Cornwall are in work, or did the Government examine purely the out-of-work figures? I think that I demonstrated beyond any doubt that the two sets of figures are by no means the same thing. The fact is that the Government have left out one third of the county with the fewest women in work anywhere in Britain.

Mr. Trippier: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman laid great emphasis on that. I do not know whether this helps, but, even when we looked at various synthetic indexes to see whether any one of them might apply, we looked at male and female unemployment together. We did not separate them. If one started on that, I do not know where it would end.

We believe that it had been a mistake on the part of successive Governments in the past to look only at unemployment levels and, in the submissions that we received in response to the White Paper published a year ago, the vast majority of people agreed with us.

In conclusion, I am confident that the House will agree that, with the new structure of regional industrial incentives, the Government have set about achieving the stated objective of reducing imbalances in regional employment opportunities in the most sensible manner possible.

National Union of Mineworkers (Sequestration)

12.10 am

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): The cardinal purpose of this debate is to obtain some positive answers from the Government, who so far have failed to answer clearly and definitively the questions raised by the Opposition.

The Government's infamous industrial relations legislation left a bitter taste in the mouths of many of us. The Government have sought to impose on the British trade union movement, and now exclusively on the miners, a rule of law which undermines the traditional openness and flexibility of industrial relations and negotiations with Government, industry and the trade union movement.

We are witnessing, and bitterly experiencing, probably the longest major strike in Britain this century. The miners' strike of 1984 is potentially the miners' strike of 1985, as the Government's indifference to the crisis in the coal industry in now apparent to everyone in the country —ordinary people as well as politicians.

The handling of the strike in legal terms is significant, in that the rule of law is being used against the legitimate views and actions of a trade union aspiring to fulfil the aims and objectives of its members as represented in its leadership. A paramount symptom is the Government's attempt to suppress the rights of that union and its members, with all the vigour that they can muster.

The law on sequestration and the apparently prejudiced interpretation of it by the courts is rapidly leading to the erosion of civil liberties. In the view of many of us, that will be the result of court decisions based on bad law.

In a democracy, it is imperative to strike a balance between the maintenance of public order and the legitimate right to express dissent. During the miners' strike, the law has been used to upset the traditional balance and to establish the right of the forces of law to go to extreme lengths. I am sure that during the debate my hon. Friends will give examples of civil conflict in the coal fields. There is an abundance—an encyclopaedia—of evidence that civil liberties have been trampled upon by certain actions taken in the name of the law. A climate of opinion has been created in which it is felt that such actions can be justified. Acting either on direct instructions or on some weird interpretation of the law, the police have taken that view in relation to the miners.

One does not need much imagination to see how the same attitude could be extended to other constitutional situations. At present, the miners happen to be regarded by the public as an unreasonable, dictatorial and unconstitutional force that is threatening civil law and moving towards civil disorder. People take that view because that is how the media and Government spokesmen have presented the situation. Public opinion is easily moulded by the media. It is very responsive to what the media present as normal. The presentation of certain selected items and issues by the media always has a receptive audience. That is called "normalisation".

The amount of media time given to Government spokesmen can easily influence people in the desired way. It can certainly be done; it is done. Regardless of the current dispute, we should be aware of the power of Government to manipulate public opinion through the media.

There is no point in democracy unless it can safeguard civil liberties. That is what is at issue now—not pit closures or the 5·2 per cent. The whole perspective has been changed by the Government, acting through the media. They have conditioned the minds of ordinary people to believe that there is now an aggressive force within the nation that chooses to ignore the whole spectrum of British law.

What is an economic pit? How is an economic pit to be defined? I am not talking in terms of pounds and pence, or in terms of the criterion of profits before people. Nor shall I talk about the NCB's accounting system. I worked for the NCB for 30 years, so I know about it. I worked as a unit engineer at the pits. Even there, we manipulated the figures. The figures were not distorted or untrue. As with the media, it was a matter of presentation. It is quite easy to do. The NCB does it when it fiddles the books.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): In the same way, the Secretary of State for the Environment has just cut the money for housing by £2 billion while saying that he is increasing the amount available.

Mr. Cunliffe: The yardstick is the same. We are told that there are uneconomic local government units.

It must be more expensive to make a miner redundant than to invest properly in the coal industry. If the Government and the NCB failed to close the 20 pits, the cost to the NCB in subsidies would be £275 million per annum. If they are closed, the Government will lose a maximum of £480 million a year in redundancy payments, supplementary benefit and lost tax revenue. That ignores the additional cost of job losses in industries that supply the mining industry. All the evidence about the economic aspects of the dispute is there to be examined.

Anyone who knows the industry knows that £130 million a year is spent on pensions for past employees and that there is a subsidence charge of £245 million a year. Those charges have nothing whatever to do with operating and production costs. The board has always made an operating profit. I had to make my returns from various collieries on that basis. Overhead costs and Government interest charges were always dealth with on the other side of the page. That was the right way. The Government must understand that, on that basis, even last year with the overtime ban which lasted six weeks the board still made a profit of £1 million.

The Central Electricity Generating Board pays 40 per cent. less for coal than for oil. Examination of how the NCB books are distorted shows how greatly coal is undervalued. At the stroke of an accountant's pen, the figures are made correct. If the NCB sold its coal to the electricity board 20 per cent. rather than 40 per cent. cheaper than oil, it would make a profit of £1·1 billion a year. That is the real perspective. It should also be borne in mind that it is twice as expensive to force a miner on to the dole as it is to keep him in work in a so-called uneconomic pit. Such facts are unchallengeable. Some of us know the system and have worked it. We know that what the board is presenting is fictitious, unreliable and biased. It is also predictable, because of Government interference.

We should also consider the reduction of spending capacity that will result from the redundancy of 20,000 miners. It is forecast, however, that we will need another 40,000 miners by the end of the century. I do not know what will happen to the mining stock between now and then. If anyone believes that it is possible to go out on the streets tomorrow and recruit miners and train them in 16 weeks, he believes nonsense. Miners are generated. They stay in families and go from generation to generation. If we destroy that basic intake from mining families and mining communities, we shall create a vacuum that will never be filled. Someone must reckon up that cost. I do not want to talk about training schemes, but they will be no substitute for the generation of miners that we have always known.

The cost of the dispute in lost production, in steel, in rail, in electricity, in tax payments and in policing costs is already close on £4 billion. If common sense does not prevail and if there is not an honourable settlement which is based on what we believe was a genuine attempt by the NUM to secure a future for mining families, I venture to suggest that it would be foolhardy and utter nonsense to ignore the economic facts that I have outlined. If we are not careful, these imaginary problems will remain for the rest of this year and throughout 1985.

I notice that not one energy Minister is present this evening. They again display their total indifference because of the closed-shop attitude of the board in negotiations. One of the Government's legal representatives—the Solicitor-General—will reply, and to him I say that, regardless of legal interpretation, it is not difficult to understand what bad law has done. The miners' case is as great and strong as ever, and it will be so in the future.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I wish to help the House and I do not want to restrict debate if I can help it, but I remind hon. Members that the subject we are discussing is Price Waterhouse and the sequestration of NUM assets. Hon. Members should relate their remarks to the topic before the House, and no doubt the Minister will reply accordingly.

12.26 am

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): We have heard the impassioned voice of the coalfield, and as the grandson of a miner I fully understand the feeling in our mining communities as expressed in the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe).

The Attorney-General did neither his case nor himself justice when, under Opposition pressure, he made his statement to the House on 11 December this year. The House of Commons is entitled to an explanation. The Attorney-General is answerable to this House, and it was because he failed to give a proper explanation, and adequately to answer the questions put to him, that my hon. Friends have sought this debate.

I hope that, for the future, Law Officers will learn that the House will not be brushed on one side. If anything novel or extraordinary has to be done, it is much easier to come clean and to explain to the House at the earliest opportunity what the Government are doing.

Instead, the right hon. and learned Gentleman sought to attack me, and ignored every question that I put to him. I readily forgive him for not following every utterance I have made on television and radio and in the press, particularly as many of them emanated from Cardiff, but I have gone to the trouble of listening again to one of the

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tapes, when I said that whoever was in breach of the law —be he a picket or a policeman—must be answerable for that breach.

I quoted the words of Lord Atkin, and I did so even though I forgive the Attorney-General for not knowing everything I have said elsewhere. However, I do not forgive him readily for not recalling that I told the House:

"The rule of law is the same for everyone",

and I quoted the memorable words of Lord Atkin who in the dark days of war in 1941 said:

"In this country, amid the clash of arms, the laws are not silent. They may be changed, but they speak the same language in war as in peace".

It is not incumbent on me or any of my hon. Friends to repeat like parrots every utterance that we make of our regard and respect for the role of law. I hope that the Solicitor-General will recognise that tonight.

In his attack upon me, the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Attorney-General missed the whole point of our concern. As I said on 11 December, there may be a hypothetical or a real need to protect the courts. We were concerned, first, about the basis for his actions. Secondly, assuming that the Attorney-General had the power, was it right for him to do it? Although there may have been advantages, was it not conceivable that the disadvantages of his actions outweighed the advantages? The Attorney-General did not throw any light on the basis for his actions. If our courts need to be protected, I believe that there must be a proper basis for their protection. Our concern relates to the basis for the actions of the Attorney-General.

The written answer which I received last Friday from the Attorney-General contained the first utterance that his actions were based upon the common law. The common law is based upon precedent. It cannot be made up. We should like to be told whether any precedents have been discovered since the exchange on 11 December for the actions which have been taken. Why are the Government so coy? Why did we have to wait until last Friday for the first reference by any Minister to the fact that the actions of the Attorney-General were based upon common law? No reference was made to this fact in any answer which the Attorney-General gave to the House.

Although there may, therefore, be a power to grant an indemnity under the common law, I was also told last Friday that, without statutory authority, the common law cannot be activated in order to pay out money under the indemnity. I should like to know how that will be provided. I come back to the original question: have the Government been able to discover throughout the long history of this country any precedents for this indemnity?

I should also like to know whether there was any real need for this action. The senior partner in Price Waterhouse said that the firm did not ask for the indemnity and that this indemnity was unsolicited. The Attorney-General has told the House that he made inquiries about what had happened and discovered that Price Waterhouse had asked the court whether there were any funds. Price Waterhouse were told that there were no funds, and they seemed to be content.

It has been repeated time after time that neither Mr. Justice Nicholls nor Price Waterhouse approached the Attorney-General. Therefore, what evidence was there —I hope the Solicitor-General will face up to this—that the orders of the court might, in the words of the Attorney-General, be frustrated? Perhaps we might be told the full extent of the property which Price Waterhouse have seized —not only the money in the bank but the houses and other property owned by the National Union of Mineworkers.

Many of my hon. Friends put down early-day motion 233 regretting the fact that the Attorney-General referred to Price Waterhouse as an

"ordinary commercial firm who are liable to run out of money".

Price Waterhouse is the third largest accountancy firm in the United Kingdom, with an annual income from fees of over £60 million. They are discussing an amalgamation with Deloitte Haskins and Sells, the second largest accountancy firm in the United Kingdom, whose annual income from fees is also over £60 million. Price Waterhouse hardly comes into the category of an ordinary commercial firm which is likely to run out of money. I understand that Price Waterhouse are far from happy that the spotlight of the Attorney-General's comments has been turned on them at a crucial stage of the amalgamation negotiations. The Solicitor-General laughs, but I am sure that he if speaks to the senior partners of Price Waterhouse they will confirm what I have said.

Price Waterhouse do not act as public benefactors when they are appointed court sequestrators. They do it for money, on an ordinary commercial basis, and they are paid on a solicitor-client basis. They are not there because they love to act as sequestrators. There is other work that they could do to earn their £60 million a year. They enter into it with their eyes fully open and, on that basis, there was hardly any need for the Attorney-General to have come to their aid on the first inquiry about whether the court had any money.

The Attorney-General told the House on 11 December that Price Waterhouse went to the court and were told that there were no funds and that it seemed "so simple" to him —the order of the court should be enforced. He said:

"As guardian of the public interest, I was the only person who could do that,."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 929.]

We have to be satisfied whether, in issuing unsolicited and unprecedented indemnities, the Attorney-General has not jumped the gun. Has he not perhaps acted a little impetuously? He told the House that he relied on information coming partly from the registrar of the court, as a result of his inquiry, and partly from newspapers. That is a very odd approach for the Attorney-General to adopt when making a crucial and unprecedented decision.

Even more important constitutional matters than the action of the Attorney-General arise in this context. Will his action be a precedent for further involvement by him in a range of civil litigation? If there is a matrimonial case in which large funds have been moved out of the courts' jurisdiction—as they are, from time to time—will the Attorney-General come to the aid of the party—who is denied his rights when the order of the court is frustrated? The pleasures of having the Attorney-General's indemnity should apply to all; the law should be the same for everyone. Or is this a one-off exercise, applying only to litigation involving the NUM? Is that union being singled out for the use of the Attorney-General's new-found power of indemnity, or can everyone involved in civil litigation expect the same pleasures and privileges?

If there is to be a widespread repetition of the Attorney-General's action, presumably we can expect the Estimates

to include a token provision of £1 to cover the possibility of future incursions by the Attorney-General into indemnity in civil litigation.

My final point relates to the Attorney-General's judgment in the matter. Given that this is current litigation in a highly contentious area and in a politically highly charged atmosphere, was it prudent of the Attorney-General to intervene at this stage? If there were clear and unambiguous evidence that the court's will would be frustrated, because, for example, this or any other firm was not willing to act as sequestrators, the position might be different. But, given the flimsy evidence before us and the Government's failure to present their case, the real danger is that the Attorney-General has been unnecessarily involved in civil litigation and has created a precedent for the future; we know not where it will stop.

That is what concerns me. I refer to the cherished concept of the independence of the Attorney-General's office and to the danger of tarnishing it. I value the independence of the judiciary. I set out my views about the dangers of tarnishing that in a recent article in *The Times*. In the same way, I value the Attorney-General's independence. With hindsight, was it wise or prudent of the Attorney-General to act? I am reminded of a war slogan "Was your journey really necessary?" In the same way, on the evidence before us, were the Attorney-General's actions really necessary?

12.40 am

Mr. Alan Rogers (Rhondda): This case is of great interest, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) has outlined the main legal issues involved. In particular, he referred to the question of the impartiality of our Law Officers. He posed them some very interesting questions, some of the answers to which may be set out in legal terms. But while those answers are important in that they will form part of the continuing struggle that we have to put up against the Government, we know what they are. After all, the Government are motivated not by any need or desire to maintain the law, but by blind hatred for the mining community.

The Conservative party does not like the mining community. It is determined to break the NUM, and it has taken this opportunity to do so in whatever way it can. It cannot win the economic argument or any other argument, so it has tried to use the law to bludgeon coal miners into returning to work. Thus, the Law Officers' actions are motivated not by the need to carry out the law impartially, but by blind dogma.

The coal mining community is participating in one of the most heroic actions that any group has participated in this century. I say "heroic", because those people are looking not for money to line their pockets—the sort of thing that Conservative Members would probably understand—or advantage or to improve their working conditions, but for protection of their communities and jobs. It is a pity that Conservative Members do not act as patriotically as them. I cannot see it as anything other than a heroic fight.

Perhaps I am slightly conditioned by my recollections, especially at this time of the year. As a young boy I used to walk with my father over the mountains from a pit village called Penybryn down past the coal owner's house to a small village in the next valley. We went to collect the Christmas poultry. There was a sense of unreality as one walked into that small village. The first thing that one noticed was that there were no men. There were a lot of women, but no men. The name of the village was Senghenydd. Those days were brought back to me quite graphically when I received a Christmas card from my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). It says:

"Lest we forget. From Marion and Ray Powell."

On the inside is something written from a friend of mine called Les Gassor, the chairman of an NUM lodge. It is entitled "The price of coal", and says:

"71 years ago, on OCT 14th 1913, an explosion at the great UNIVERSAL COLLIERY, SENGHENYDD, claimed the lives of 440 men and boys."

That was every male in the village.

"The manager of the mine was found guilty of 8 charges of failure to carry out his statutory duties and he was fined £24·5½p per life. The COAL COMPANY was found innocent of any blame, but after pressure from the SOUTH WALES MINERS FEDN, the Inspector of Mines filed an appeal. In 1915 the Court of the King's bench allowed the appeal on one charge and sent the case back to the Magistrates Court for conviction. In February 1916, 3 years after the explosion, the same magistrates found the COMPANY GUILTY and fined them £10. Who looked after the widows and orphans left behind? The local community of course, just as they are now when struggle and strife have taken the place of grief and sorrow in our area. Those who criticise the lack of respect for the law shown by strikers in our fight to save jobs, should remember that we have never had justice in the whole history of our Trade Unions"

and of our relationships with the law.

"The price of coal is one which has been paid heavily by our communities. A miner's life is a fight for existence every time he leaves home to start his shift in the pit and is more of a struggle now than ever when the Government wishes to cast him and his family on the scrap-heap for short-term, short-sighted 'economic' reasons."

That was written by Les Gassor, a striking miner, in 1984.

I remember that village. I remember my father going to work. I remember waiting and hoping that he would come home. I remember my brother, who now lives in Dorking and who was a pit overman, being badly crushed when he went to bring out a boy from the village who was trapped in the coal. Those people have an enormous sense of togetherness and community.

I am afraid that Conservative Members just do not understand the miners and the mining community. They do not understand that they are prepared to suffer nine months of continuous hardship, not for any selfish reasons, not to line their pockets, but simply to protect their homes and communities. They were the same miners who, in 1916 and 1917, rallied to the flag and laid down their lives by their thousands in the trenches of France, as evidenced by war memorials in every mining village in south Wales.

During the last war miners gave their all to provide the energy to keep this country going to push back the bounds of Fascism that is now coming back to Britain. They were miners who, in 1948, after the industry was nationalised, gave their all and produced reduced-price energy in order to revitalise and recharge this country so that it could recover from the war. If they had had the economic price of coal then, they would have built up so much capital that they would never have had to borrow a single penny. But they provided cheap energy for the country because they were taken into public ownership. Perhaps they saw themselves as public servants. The union also co-operated, foolishly in my view, because at the end of the day it has turned out that, although the present leader of the NUM warned miners many years ago of what would happen, his

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voice went unheeded. He is castigated now and subject to the utmost vilification, but if his views had been followed 10 years ago, we might not have been in this mess today.

The miners inherited a bankrupt industry in 1948. In 1919 the Sankey commission, which was set up because of the abuse of the coal industry by the coal owners during the first world war, said that our coal was so vital a resource that it was too precious to leave in the hands of private industry. Yet, it was more than 30 years before it was taken into public ownership.

I am only sad that the Government are not loyal to people who have given enormous service to the country. The Government are unpatriotic and will eventually sell everyone down the river for a quick buck. They will never understand the miners or the mining communities. That is why they will never beat them. They can bludgeon the miners back to work, sequestrate their union's funds and starve their children, but they will never beat them.

12.50 am

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): The debate is about Price Waterhouse. We must consider the sinister reasons why it has entered into the dispute. It gives me no pleasure to speak about the miners' strike and the sequestration of their union's funds. There should not have been a strike. The Government, for their own motives, brought the strike about, which brought Price Waterhouse on to the scene. There was no need for the strike, and therefore the responsibility must rest firmly on the shoulders of the Government.

When I was asked what the lads hoped to gain by striking, I said that they had everything to gain and nothing to lose because the strike was justified by the Government's entrenched long-term views about the coal industry. The Government have pursued and are pursuing short-term policies that are selling the nation down the river. Until such time as they consider the long-term needs of the country, we shall stumble from crisis to crisis.

I now turn to Mac the Knife. A great deal has been said about concessions that the Coal Board has made. The Coal Board has not moved one inch from day one of the strike. The introduction of Price Waterhouse into the dispute was therefore inevitable.

NACODS held a ballot. As a result of that, the Government said that the National Union of Mineworkers should accept what had been offered to NACODS. It was to receive its money and to be offered a talking shop when a pit was to be closed. The pit review and the colliery review closure procedure needs to be helped. That is at the heart of the strike. The Coal Board will decide to shut a pit, it will announce it to the union, and the union must then go through the charade of meeting the people who took the original decision to close the pit.

I do not know many instances where the board has back-pedalled. It may have changed its position slightly with regard to some development work, but apart from that it has not shifted. I have sat on the area consultative committee in Doncaster for many years. The lads said, rightly, that such local consultative committees are nothing but talking shops, because, at the end of the day, the Coal Board will make the decision, irrespective of how well the lads have presented their case. The Secretary of State for Energy announces to all who will listen that Scargill will not move from his position. What he should do is to tell Mac the Knife not only to shift his position but to get on the next boat to America.

The Government have not been honest about their long-term plans for the industry. If they are allowed to proceed on the course that they have taken, I envisage an industry with no more than 65,000 to 70,000 men producing 70 million tonnes of coal from a few super-pits. It is obvious that that policy will be pursued, because the Government are always saying that market forces should dominate our industries. If market forces are allowed to dominate, we must also take into account the balance of payments. Has the Chancellor of the Exchequer taken into account the amount that Price Waterhouse will spend in Europe on trying to return the NUM funds?

The Coal Board has announced the sacking of 450 men for vandalising pit property. I believe that the Secretary of State for Energy and the Government should resign, because they are causing more damage to the industry than are any lads back in the coalfields. We should consider the damage that the Government and Price Waterhouse are causing in our communities. The long-term plans about which the Government talk in relation to "Plan for Coal" are not worth a light unless they are geared to an energy policy. In 1978, there were posters on the billboards saying to the lads, "The industry needs you, and you will have a long and happy future with us."

It should not be for the Coal Board or the Government to decide whether a pit should close. We should have an independent panel to which both sides could present their cases. If the Government and the Coal Board are so convinced that what they say is correct, that panel will support them. When one takes into account all the policies, and how they affect the quality of life, there is obviously no case for pit closures.

Last Wednesday, the Attorney-General gave the worst performance of any Tory Minister—it was atrocious. One wonders what the connection is between the Attorney-General, the Government and Price Waterhouse. I do not doubt that when the historians are writing about this dispute, they will dig out something to show the link. I wonder whether it is the old boy's network, because at one stage Price Waterhouse used to be involved with the Government. It could be that the old boys are working together to add a little extra money to the millions that they already make.

Mr. Rogers: In time for Christmas.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend is right.

The Attorney-General said that the Government were not creating a precedent that would pass on from one act of vandalism to another. I wonder whether he will have a word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and advise him to take some VAT off the pop record that was made for Ethiopia. It is a pity that compassion and the crocodile tears that one sees on the Tory Benches on that matter do not come through in reality and in practice here. Miners who were made redundant before the strike began, and whose notice ended after the strike had started, have found that there is no compassion or understanding for them.

Great play has been made about the pit violence. I have not heard any condemnation from the Tory Benches of police violence; not even a question mark has been raised about what happens in our coalfields. In Toxteth there was a public inquiry, but in Armthorpe, a pit village where the

police behaved like a set of hooligans, nothing whatsoever happened. There seems to be a sinister central control in this dispute. On the point about breaking the law, I wonder whether the Prime Minister will comply with the EEC ruling and pay the milk fines that are due from this country —or is she above that law?

Does the Solicitor-General agree that the hardships and humiliation that the suffragettes suffered to ensure that women got the vote were worth while? If they had not taken such action, this country might have been better off, because we would not have had this Prime Minister.

1.3 am

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): This is an important debate, and, with great respect to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) who is a master of the understatement and of discretion, it is not a debate about minor indiscretions by the Attorney-General. It is not a debate in which we say to him, with hindsight, that he could have done differently. We are debating a cold attack on the law of Parliament and the constitution by the Attorney-General.

When I first saw the Supplementary Estimates in the Red Book concerning this so-called token provision for sequestration, I immediately said to myself, both as a barrister and a member of the Treasury Select Committee, that the provisions were illegal. My subsequent inquiries served to reveal the truth of that.

My first instinct was to ask: what is the authority for these provisions? I knew that there was no statutory authority because I had seen that problem before when I was on the Treasury Select Committee. I asked a journalist whether he could give me the Downing street briefing about what had happened. The journalist illegally provided me with that briefing. The briefing, dated Monday 10 December, was issued at 12.5 pm by Mr. Bernard Ingham, the Prime Minister's press secretary. The briefing stated:

"The legal powers were given under the common law powers of the Crown. The Crown has the same freedom as any other individual to give an indemnity . . . Since the Crown is dependent upon parliament to vote the necessary funds, it has been agreed between the Committee of Public Accounts and the Treasury that where a need to incur contingent commitments arises from a continuing policy requirement, powers should be conferred by statute. However, when giving an indemnity is a one-off exercise it is proper to rely on the Appropriations Act to provide the funds."

The Appropriations Act is a camouflage for illegality in this case.

I am sorry that the Attorney-General is ill and so is not present to hear the condign criticism that is justly made of him on this occasion. I shall advance four arguments. First, I know, from my position on the Treasury Select Committee, that no attempt should be made to extend common law powers into areas in which they do not properly belong, into unconvential areas and into areas where they would not be properly understood. That must be a definitional equation, because the purpose of common law powers is to be conventional and understood. In this case, the powers are not conventional and are not understood by hon. Members or individuals outside the House.

Secondly, for as long as anyone can remember, it has been the practice that any common law powers arrived at under the Crown prerogative should not be used in politically contentious cases. It is impossible to conceive of the use of the powers of the Crown prerogative in a more politically contentious matter, so their use stands squarely outside the conventinal use of such powers by the House.

Thirdly, questions have been asked about the precedents in this case. I have looked at all the precedents since time immemorial—or at least the year 1189—and there are no precedents in this case.

The fourth argument involves the analogy used by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). If, by some chance, the Chancellor lent me some money, I refused to pay him back, he then took legal action, I salted my money away abroad and sequestrators were sent in, no hon. Member or anyone outside the House in his right mind would suggest that the Attorney-General would have powers under the Crown prerogative to make token provision for sequestrators. That is the fundamental abuse of the civil law, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred.

The Attorney-General has confused the use of his powers. He has powers to advise the Government but does not have powers to advise the Conservative party for the purposes of political advantage. That is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has done in this case. The Attorney-General has advised the Conservative party on how to gain political advancement and, in the process, he has abused the law, parliamentary sovereignty and the Constitution.

What is worrying is that the Attorney-General did not act on a one-off basis; this is part of a pattern followed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. That is why it is all the more important for hon. Members to stand up and say, "No, we have had enough of this Attorney-General and the abuse of these powers."

We all remember sanctions busting in Rhodesia. I am one of about half a dozen people in this country who have seen the original files. I know about law breaking by politicians, civil servants and Sir Frank MacFadyen. I remember this Attorney-General coming here and saying that he supported the Director of Public Prosecutions in not prosecuting those people because some of them had retired and it would be difficult to obtain the evidence.

When I was at the Bar, no one ever came up to me and said, "Don't bother, Mr. Sedgemore. I understand that your client has retired," or "It will be difficult to get the evidence." That was a similar abuse of the law. We all remember that only last November, when *The Observer* published a series of articles about waste at the Ministry of Defence, the Attorney-General decided to take action against Mr. Williams and *The Observer*. What is worse, those of us who know remember the Attorney-General going to the Garrick club and saying that he would "get *The Observer*". He wanted "to get" *The Observer* because the Prime Minister was being attacked over Oman. That is a disgraceful, shameful abuse of the Attorney-General's power.

We cannot have the Attorney-General, once over sanctions busting, once over Mr. Williams and *The Observer* and once over the sequestration by Price Waterhouse, abusing the powers of the courts of this land. That is the Attorney-General. If he were here, the right thing for him to do would be to resign. The right thing for people such as me to do when we go outside the House is to report him to the Inns of Court and say, "We have had

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

enough." I do not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you remember reading E. P. Thompson's "Whigs and Hunters" in which he said:

"The laws of England were a nuisance, to be bent and manipulated by the ruling classes."

The person who has bent and manipulated the laws of England for too long in the House of Commons over the past six years is the Attorney-General.

What are we to say about Price Waterhouse? It is engaged in a merger with Deloitte Haskins and Sells, which will make it the biggest accountancy firm in the world. The message that must go out from the Conservative Benches and the Attorney-General is that Deloitte Haskins and Sells would probably be unwise to become involved in the kind of political dynamite into which Price Waterhouse is leading it. It will have nothing but trouble from Labour Members, and, if there is a future Labour Government, it will have nothing but trouble from them. It will have trouble from nationalised industries, local authorities, quangos and future Governments. The only decent thing to come out of this whole discreditable and despicable operation will be the ruin of that merger.

We all know that the managing director of Price Waterhouse earns £187,000 a year. It is monstrous that the Attorney-General should seek to indemnify that firm, with its turnover of £60 million per annum, and which pays its director £187,000.

The Attorney-General has debased and demeaned the laws of this country. I am not interested in listening to the Solicitor-General's answer. I do not want to be rude to him, but on occasions like this it would probably be better if we were to adjourn the debate so that the Attorney-General could answer for his misconduct and for the way in which he has debased the laws of this country, our Parliament and the constitution.

1.13 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): This matter may be the responsibility of the Law Officers and one can understand why the Solicitor-General is here, but, as my hon. Friends have already made clear, this debate also has a great deal to do with energy. I rather regret the fact that there are no energy Ministers on the Treasury Bench, because words have been and will be said which suggest that their presence would have been appropriate.

Even though the matter may primarily be one for the Solicitor-General, I regret that there is no one present on the Conservative Benches with any interest in energy, and that there is no Conservative Member to give support and sustenance to the Solicitor-General as he seeks to answer my hon. Friend's charges.

The Government may feel that they have been ingenious. It may be an ingenious adventure or initiative, but if the degree of ingenuity that has been employed in this rather sordid enterprise had been applied at any time during the past 10 long months of dispute, the nation might have been better served. It is almost 10 months since those employed at Cortonwood colliery were told that their colliery would cease to produce coal in five weeks. The Government may be free—I do not know—from the charge of manipulation in this adventure, but they have watched the media manipulating the facts for virtually the whole of the past 10 months and refrained from comment. The chairman, deputy chairman and secretary of the National Coal Board have made public comments to the effect that the board never proposed that Cortonwood colliery should close in just five weeks. Mr. MacGregor and his deputy, Mr. Cowan, along with the secretary to the board, Mr. Brandrath, in a letter to *The Times*, claim that it was merely proposed that Cortonwood should be subject to face colliery review procedures. They carefully ignored the fact that Cortonwood was down for cessation of production in five weeks, and the Government allowed them to do so. The Coal Board has deliberately and conveniently forgotten that, and over the ensuing months it has ignored the decision that it knew, and must have known, was made.

The Government have been ingenious in introducing this precedent. I only wish that they had shown ingenuity in ensuring that the truth in this bitter dispute was not allowed conveniently to be forgotten.

Another example of manipulation was when one of my hon. Friends became concerned about speeches made in the House by some of us who represent coalfield communities. He wrote to the chairman and expressed his concern about a case which he had heard presented in the Chamber. He observed that it was astonishing that Elsecar colliery should be closed in the latter part of 1983 and that over a hundred workers from that colliery should be moved to Cortonwood and given a guarantee of five years' work. Ministers are well aware that the reply was, in effect, a denial of a guarantee of five years' work. The deputy chairman wrote to the effect that, far from a guarantee of five years, everyone at Elsecar and Cortonwood knew that Cortonwood had a much shorter life than five years. He knew, as everyone in the board knew and as Treasury Ministers should have known, that the guarantee had been given.

We have had a great deal of ingenuity. There has been this ingenious precedent of paying a company which did not seek to be paid. On the other hand, there has been an absence of any ingenuity that might have brought this bitter dispute to an end. The dispute has continued for months longer than it need have done. There have been months of enormous hardship and embitterment. I do not know, but the dispute may continue for many more months.

If the Government had shown any sensitivity—they have already been accused of a complete lack of it—the strike would not have occurred. Instead of devoting effort to promoting peace, or to trying to assuage the bitterness, which will last for a long time, they have adopted a clever and almost undergraduate approach of providing money to a company which did not ask for it. That will create a dangerous and serious precedent.

I regret that no Department of Energy Ministers are on the Government Front Bench to give moral support to the Solicitor-General. I regret that they are not here to hearken to the calls for sanity that have been and will continue to be made. But if the hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues are to rely on this sort of adventurism, the nation will sooner or later wake up to the realities that face us.

Nearly 10 months have passed, at the end of which all we can see is this sort of adventure by the Attorney-General, supported by the Solicitor-General, and action that deserves the pen of a latter-day Gilbert and Sullivan. It may provide the material for someone to write a paperback to while away the tedium of a dull journey. It may have filled the headlines of the newspapers and

provided people with comment about the jet-setting life of some City financiers. It does not actually help us one jot or tittle to solve the problem that has dominated the lives of many of us in the House for virtually 10 months. It is the condition of those whom we represent that should command attention from Government, not silly initiatives by people whose titles may almost have stemmed from Gilbert and Sullivan.

I trust that the Solicitor-General will remind his colleagues in government and energy Ministers that, while the Opposition recognise the severity and seriousness of the precedent that is involved, we are concerned about a much greater and deeper reality. It is that to which the Government's ingenuity should be addressed.

1.21 am

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): In the debate earlier today, a Minister would not allow money to be spent on house building. That was completely wrong, but it is what the Minister decided. In contrast, on 11 December, the Attorney-General was throwing money about like confetti. Is it not strange that only today a Minister objected to money being spent on providing houses for the needy, yet the Attorney-General had plenty of money to throw about to protect those who have plenty of money? It is a strange affair, but that is what happened.

I am sorry that the Attorney-General is ill. He should have been here. The Solicitor-General, who is here in his place, will appreciate that we hope that he gets well quickly——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): There is nothing wrong with the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Welsh: No — Opposition Members have compassion, and I hope that we always do. That is very important.

The Attorney-General said that Mr. Justice Nicholls ordered sequestration, and the sequestrators appointed by the court were named on 11 December as Price Waterhouse. That was due to a civil action brought to the courts — Taylor and Foulstone *v.* the NUM. That is important, because it is the issue that we are debating tonight.

The Attorney-General said that the Government would indemnify. I am not quite sure what that word means. I think that it means that if anybody loses any money, the Government will compensate him. As a layman, I think that that is what it means. The Government will indemnify Price Waterhouse against the costs that it incurs. I think that the Solicitor-General will agree with that. On 11 December there was no reference to Justice Davies. Therefore, I come to the conclusion that only the costs of Price Waterhouse will be indemnified. Nowhere can I find in the Attorney-General's statement any reference to Justice Davies. I think that the Solicitor-General will agree with that.

On 6 December Michael Arnold, senior involvements partner of City accountants Arthur Young McClelland Moores, was appointed as receiver. At no time did the Attorney-General say that the Government would look after that firm. They are only going to look after Price Waterhouse under the appointment of Justice Nicholls. Nothing from Justice Davies will be looked after at all, because that was not mentioned in the statement of 11 December. The appointments and statements of certain people will be covered, but nothing else. That is important, because what Justice Davies did will cost a lot more. Will the Solicitor-General confirm that the intention is to look after Justice Nicholls but not Justice Davies? If that is so, the costs—at present about £100,000—will have to be divided.

If that is not the position, there is a great gap which needs to be clarified in relation to the Attorney-General's statement, as I am sure the Solicitor-General will agree. I hope that the Solicitor-General will make a statement about that today. If his statement differs from the Attorney-General's statement, it will mean not that the House was misled on 11 December but that all the evidence—the whole truth, as it were—was not given with regard to the support to be given by the Government. I hope that the Solicitor-General will explain exactly what the Government intend to underwrite.

I cannot imagine why the Government decided to support Price Waterhouse—a firm so rich that it could afford to lend the Government money if they got into difficulties. It is strange indeed. I should have liked to ask the Attorney-General about that, but I accept that he is ill and that I therefore cannot do so. If there is a reason for supporting in this way the actions of a legal firm acting on behalf of the law of the land, it is strange indeed that the body against which action is being taken is the National Union of Mineworkers.

Action of such magnitude has never been taken against other unions. I agree that there are other issues on which action could be taken. Indeed, it has been done. The law of the land—not the state—was involved in 1972, in the case of Gold *v.* the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and in 1973 in the case of Col-Mech Ltd. *v.* the AUEW. But in those cases the amount at issue was only the amount required by the law. This is the first time that the law of the land has ever attempted to take the entire funds of any institution, and the institution involved just happens to be the NUM.

There are special factors involved in this case, and the action taken has never been taken before. I question the position of the Attorney-General under the law of the land.

What is also vitally important is not what the Attorney-General has done, but what he has not done. With regard to certain issues involving law and order, the Attorney-General has sat back. The Solicitor-General may say that law and order is the Home Secretary's job, but it has been necessary for action to be taken by his Department. The hon. and learned Gentleman has not acted to protect certain issues, when he could have done so. There was the occasion when four policemen invaded the house of an 84-year-old woman in Stainforth in my constituency. That poor beautiful lady weighed about five stone. Nothing was done. The Attorney-General did not take action against any policeman or anyone else. That was a disgrace. The matter could have been taken further, but the lady did not wish it to be.

In the early days of the mining dispute, when there was no trouble, I was in Nottingham when a car was pulled open because the men inside would not wind the window down. The police smashed the windscreen. They could have hurt those poor miners. I telephoned the chief constable of Nottinghamshire. He was not available. I spoke to the deputy chief constable. I said, "You cannot condone this." He said, "I do." He condoned that violence.

[Mr. Welsh]

He condoned physical violence, and the Attorney-General was not interested. Yet he should be looking after the nation.

There are ways of complaining about such occurences. The Home Secretary says, "Take it up. Complain. Take them to court. The NUM has plenty of money." The NUM has no money now, so how could anyone sue it? It is embarrassing to hear the Home Secretary tell us to sue the police when the NUM's money has been taken.

I should like to ask the Solicitor-General a direct question. Did the Prime Minister have anything to do with that decision? That is all I am asking. I hope that I shall get an answer.

1.35 am

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The sequestration of the NUM's funds by Price Waterhouse, the blank cheque that the Government have given to underwrite that company and the involvement of the Attorney-General's office in this dispute is a combination that has been brought about by fetching the law into industrial relations. The danger in this dispute is that the Government seriously think that, by Price Waterhouse sequestrating NUM funds, they can break the union. Even Tuesday's *Financial Times* wrote:

"Nalgo not to give sequestrators details of funds for miners . . . The Nalgo decision could itself place the union in contempt of court".

Where will it stop, this bringing of the law into industrial relations? The union's money does not belong to the general secretary. NUM money does not belong to Scargill; General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union money does not belong to Basnett, Transport and General Workers Union money does not belong to Moss Evans; and Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen money does not belong to Ray Buckton. The money belongs to the members who have contributed for many years.

I joined a union when I was 14 and have paid union contributions every year since, even when I served in the Armed Forces. There are many like me who have belonged to a union for many years. When the Government think that they are getting at a general secretary, they are in fact hitting all the members of a union.

If the law could solve industrial relations, the simplest thing would be for the Government to pass a law that required everyone to go to work from 7.30 am until 5 pm without a break. Indeed, why should they not pass a law saying that the miners must go back to work tomorrow morning—if the law can solve industrial relations? The law has the opposite effect. It has lengthened rather than shortened this dispute. Many people in Britain feel that there are two laws—one for some people and another for the rest. When the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food came back with milk quotas from Europe, dairy farmers were not particularly happy. When there was a milk race at Aberystwyth, dairy farmers got their tractors and Land Rovers out and barricaded the road to stop the milk race. One farmer was arrested. Yet hundreds of miners are arrested for obstruction when they merely step from the pavement to the road. Tha is why people think that there are two laws.

When the Prime Minister went to speak at a Tory meeting in Wales, someone among a group of farmers' wives who were demonstrating threw an egg and hit the Prime Minister. Nobody wants that to happen, but the point is that nobody was arrested. Yet hundreds of miners who stand outside mines shouting "$cabs!" are immediately arrested and put in gaol. That is why many people think that there are two laws and that the law is being brought into disrepute.

We have seen all this before. I remember the sequestrator coming to Hebburn urban district council, as a result of industrial relations legislation which was introduced by the 1970-74 Government formed by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), to take £50,000 of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers' money which was invested in that council. It did not work then and it will not work this time, because a union's assets are under the caps of members of that union. They cannot be taken away.

Many people also feel strongly about the Social Security Act, which denies benefit to the dependants of strikers. A few months ago I asked the Prime Minister why the law should treat the dependants of the Yorkshire Ripper—who is in jail to protect society—better than the dependants of a Yorkshire miner who is on strike to defend his community. That is nonsense.

If a trade unionist went to work tomorrow and voted for a strike, £16 would be deducted from the benefit paid to his dependants, but if he went to work and shot the foreman, he would be put in jail and his dependants would be looked after. That is the nonsense of our trade union legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) hit the nail right on the head when he said that the issue is not about uneconomic pits. It is an attempt to break one of our strongest trade unions. Given the legislation which has been introduced by the Government since 1979—the Social Security Act, the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982 and the trade union legislation which has recently received Royal Assent — it is easy to see what is happening.

Many years ago I read an article by Martin Niemoller on what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945. He said:

"When they came for the Communists we were not Communists—so we did nothing.

When they came for the Jews we were not Jews—so we did nothing.

When they came for the Social Democrats we were not Social Democrats—so we did nothing.

When they came for the Trade Unionists we were not Trade Unionists—so we did nothing.

When they came for the liberals and intellectuals we were scared—so we did nothing.

When they came for the Churchmen we were frightened—so we did nothing.

When they came for us we looked for help—but we were alone!"

The same is happening to the trade union movement, and those words are as true now as they were when Martin Niemoller first wrote them. In the context of this dispute they would read:

"When they came for the steelworkers we were not steelworkers—so we did nothing.

When they came for the railwaymen we were not in ASLEF—so we did nothing.

When they came for the NGA we were not in the printing industry—so we did nothing.

When they took the union cards off the civil servants at GCHQ we were scared—so we did nothing.

When they came for the miners we were frightened—so we did nothing.

When they came for us we looked for help—but we were alone."

That is my message to the trade union movement, and I hope that it takes notice of it.

1.43 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Lest we forget why we are gathered here this evening, it might be worth recalling the incident that took place the other day in the Chamber, when the Attorney-General ventured upon what can only be described as a vicious attack on my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). That was an occasion that we all recall, because nothing that my right hon. and learned Friend said in any way deserved the response that he received. It might be that the Attorney-General is not au fait with the practices of parliamentarians in this House, and that may be why he made that mistake.

I cannot match the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who put his case emotionally and accurately on behalf of the people he represents in the valleys of south Wales.

I was born in Ty-coch, Swansea. As a child, I remember going up those valleys with my father. I remember sitting at the knee of my grandmother who explained to me what happened in south Wales in the 1920s. I have never suffered such experiences. I can savour them only through the experience of others, but they bear examination. They illustrate what may happen if the Government get their way. The Government wish to use the law of this land to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers. Let nobody outside the Chamber be in any doubt about their intention. If they do not understand the implications of the Government's intentions, they should read the history of the Labour movement and try to understand the implications of smashing a trade union. We can remove a union's assets and take away its worldly wealth, but we cannot remove its sole raison d'etre.

Last weekend a very beautiful photograph appeared in the *Observer Review*. It showed five women standing on a picket line in south Wales. Underneath was the heading:

"No surrender in the valleys."

The expressions on the faces of those women showed their sheer guts and determination never to be defeated. That is what the Government face. They cannot resolve the problem in the courts, through sequestration, or by destroying the NUM. The Government will have to face the wrath of the tens of thousands of people who will never forget what is happening today. We are talking not just about a few people, but about the families of those miners who are in the front line of this very tragic experience —perhaps as many as 250,000 people in the heart of Britain's industrial areas. They form the backbone of the industrial working class of this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda said, they will never forget.

There is an alternative to sequestration. During the last two or three weeks we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the Government to two recently published documents. One was published by five academic accountants, all of whom have experience of the accounts of the NCB. The second document was published by the London Business School.

The first document effectively challenges most of the commercial and financial assumptions of the National Coal Board about its closure programme. That case was answered at the Dispatch Box by the Prime Minister in response to a number of questions that were put to her by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). Upon each occasion we went back to those who carried out the research and asked them to clarify the position. Subsequently they withdrew the original document which was to be published in the magazine *Accountancy*. Yesterday morning the revised version of their original document went into print in *Accountancy Age*. Most of my hon. Friends have a copy of that document. It answers all the criticisms made by the Prime Minister in the House and by the National Coal Board in discussions with the Government, the Prime Minister's private office and the magazine "Accountancy". Their reservations have been answered, and that document is relevant.

The London Business School document must be viewed in terms of its ability to provide a solution to the industrial action. The document says that if allowances are made for fluctuating potential profitability in pits — what the authors define as avoidable costs — about 160,000 people are currently employed in pits which are potentially profitable. That figure has been derived by applying the most stringent criterion of profitability; that is, that every pit must break even, not just the industry as a whole. The document states:

"Suppose the miners' fierce resistance to further closures, following a period of three years in which some 35,000 mining redundancies were peacably agreed, does reflect their fears that a further 100,000 jobs could disappear. Is a compromise possible whereby the National Union of Mineworkers is persuaded to accept the principle of closure on economic grounds in return for a guarantee that the principle will not be pursued to the point where the industry is completely decimated? If such a compromise is sought, then further discussions of the economics of the industry will be needed."

That document and the others are an alternative to sequestration. They are the olive branch which independent observers, watching from outside, who wish to see the dispute resolved are submitting as the basis on which further negotiations can take place. On the basis of conversations with persons who are close to the National Union of Mineworkers national executive, I believe that if the Government were to show, in even the minutest way, that those two documents could form the basis for a resumption of negotiations, the National Union of Mineworkers would tell the Government — privately, initially—that things could start to happen.

The dispute will have to end one day. The Government have alternatives. They can use the courts and sequestration to crush the union. They may remove its assets, but they will not crush the spirit of the miners. Whatever happens, the union will remain in spirit.

Alternatively, the Government can send even a tiny signal of an intention to examine documents that might form the basis of further negotiations. If they did that, people would wish to go to the negotiating table and we would see the end of the dispute.

If we proceed on the basis of what has happened so far —we have already spent, on a conservative estimate, £1·5 billion—a further £1 billion may run down the plug-hole in a matter of months. Is that what the British people want? Those two documents could form the basis of negotiation and bring the parties together. To talk in terms of there being no movement in the NUM's position would be highly irresponsible if the Government said that those documents could form the basis for negotiation. If

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the Government made that offer, I am sure that the NUM would equally wish to respond, and that people throughout the United Kingdom would say that it should do so.

There is a way out of the dispute. The Government need not go back to the courts. The courts are not needed. Flexibility is needed. Those two documents provide the basis for flexibility. The Minister should go to his colleagues and say, "Let us have a look at those documents that Labour Members have been on about for the past three weeks. Let us send signals out to the NUM and see whether what those Labour Members said in the debate the other night was empty rhetoric or really meant something." I know that what I have said is based on real conversations that have taken place.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Front Bench wishes to catch my eye at 2.45 am. Five hon. Members are still waiting to speak. If they limit themselves to nine minutes each, they should all be able to do so.

1.56 am

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I shall take note of the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am glad to have this opportunity to speak about the sequestration, Price Waterhouse, and the unprecedented guarantees that the Government have given. They are unprecedented, but not unexpected. The Government are dogmatically determined to defeat and destroy the NUM. Hon. Members should make no mistake: the sole reason for sequestration and for giving that indemnity was to destroy the NUM and to end the dispute in that way. The Government will not win like that, because, as long as the miners are willing to withhold their labour, they cannot do so.

I represent a constituency that was founded on two industries: cotton, which has almost gone, and coal mining, which has completely disappeared. In Burnley coal was mined for 500 or 600 years, but our last coal mine at Hapton valley closed about two years ago. Many people still work at Agecroft and other pits, and travel to work every day. But there are retired miners and miners who took redundancy because they felt that they were too old to take the transfer when Hapton valley closed. They say that their only regret about this dispute is that it did not happen a few years ago, and that we did not fight to save the mines in Burnley and in many other areas. That is the tragedy. That is what should have been done.

The amazing thing is that, although the NCB has closed its operations in Burnley, within the past few months a private coal mine has opened to extract the coal that the board left behind. At tomorrow night's meeting of the planning committee in Burnley there will be yet another application to mine more coal from the pits left there.

Every industry fiddles the accounts and shows profits where it wants. Multinationals can even show profits in the countries that they want. Until last year I worked in an industry that manufactured television tubes. We were told that we were making them at a loss, but another part of the company that made the sets, was making a substantial profit out of those tubes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said that the NCB's objective is that every pit must make a profit. That is nonsense. We must judge the industry as a whole. Whether the industry is successful depends on how it meets the nation's energy needs. That cannot be judged solely in accounting terms. We should look at the national energy policy. If the Government were doing their job, they would use coal to extend the life of the natural gas that we have and start feeding substitute natural gas into the pipeline. They would also consider coal liquefication and extending the life of our oil reserves with substitutes. Those are the directions in which we should be working.

The Prime Minister often refers to Victorian values and seems to be proud of them. Let us remember the old industrial and pit towns of Britain in Victorian times. Is that what Britain wants to return to? The Prime Minister is trying to return the trade union movement to Victorian times. Britain may have been wealthy. We may have been powerful in Victorian times, but that power was achieved on the backs of ordinary working people. That surely cannot be acceptable in 1984 and 1985.

There is no doubt that the NCB provoked the dispute by not abiding by the agreed procedures at Cortonwood. Having invested a large amount of money and told the miners that they had a future, the NCB suddenly said that production would cease in five weeks' time. That would obviously be provocative and cause a dispute.

The police have turned people back on motorways because they believed that they might be going to picket and that there might be a dispute or some other unfortunate incident. If that were done on any Saturday, when coaches are travelling to different parts of the country with football supporters, in the belief that there may be a disturbance at a football match, it would not be acceptable. That is the path down which the Government are going. It is an infringement of civil rights and the development of a police state. We want to see that practice ended. Since the dispute began in the first week of March, the Government have not taken one positive action to try to resolve the dispute and get the miners back to work. I have never known another national dispute where the Government have not tried to intervene at some stage to try to bring both sides together in negotiations to resolve the dispute.

The Government have not intervened because they have one objective: they want to defeat the mineworkers and Arthur Scargill. That will not be allowed to happen because it is not Arthur Scargill's battle; it is the NUM's battle, and it has the support of many millions of people in Britain. It has the support of the Labour party and it will win. Ultimately the Government will have to recognise that there must be negotiations and that we must try to achieve a peaceful settlement and develop sensible energy use in Britain.

2.3 am

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Roughly one third of the pits in the Lancashire coalfield are in my constituency and just under one third of its miners. My miners have been on strike since the beginning of the dispute and they remain resolute in their determination to see the matter through to the end. I mention those matters in opening because when we begin to consider the matter, many questions, particularly with regard to the sequestration, require to be answered.

I made an application to ask a private notice question on Monday this week which was refused. It was very much

in the terms of a question that I asked the Attorney-General, to which I received an answer. I seek not to be critical because it is not good manners to be critical of a person in his absence. I do not seek to be critical. However, on that occasion I received an answer that as a solicitor—I am no longer one—I would not have given.

My question was whether or not the precedent set in this matter would be extended. I received a professional attack in reply, as did my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). I am used to the professional banter of the House, but that does not negate the question. On what precedent were all these matters based? We now hear that it is the common law of England. That is like saying to a farmer that there is a grain store over there. It means nothing. It does not answer the question.

The private notice question that I sought to put down on Monday was this. At the time of the Attorney-General's statement we were told that the sequestrators had about £8,000 in cash, which they could glean towards the payment of their fees. The sum was paltry and Price Waterhouse needed to be indemnified. However, it did not want it. That is on public record, so, that matter need not be pursued further.

The House was not told, what any competent lawyer already knew, that the National Union of Mineworkers owned many properties in which its existing officials and retired former officials were tenants. Those union assets are within the United Kingdom and are available to the sequestrators. During the weekend there were press reports about former members of the NUM being written to about the payment of their rent, including Lord Gormley. He was asked to pay his rent and he said that in future he would pay it to the sequestrators.

When the statement was made to the House, that fact was clearly known to the sequestrators. Was it known to the Attorney-General? The assets had a tangible and genuine value and were within the possession of the sequestrators in so far as an application for payment of rent had already been made. What then was the need for the indemnity? The assets were there.

I would not countenance or support the realisation of those assets, but the principle is established. The assets were available. The question of my right hon. and learned Friend to the Attorney-General and that which I put were exactly the same. Bearing in mind what normally happens in a sequestration, what was the purpose of the indemnity? The truth is that it was a purely political act, motivated not by the Attorney-General, but from another quarter, as was clearly demonstrated by the press statement. One more knife was being driven into the wound which has been unnecessarily created during the dispute.

It has been blatantly obvious from the word go that, had the normal rules and practices of industrial action been applied to the dispute, the matter would have been resolved a long time ago. Every time a solution has been sought—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has referred openly to this in the House—the Coal Board negotiators telephone, not the Coal Board, but Downing street. The dispute has been driven deeper and deeper by the Government's complete inability to negotiate or to behave in a way that sought negotiation.

We can all play politics. We can all say that we want resolution on our terms, but I say this to the Government: every day that passes, people in my constituency are paying the price for the intransigence of the Government and their unwillingness to make a move to resolve the dispute. Many thousands of my constituents, whether they be miners or miners' relatives or children, have suffered inordinately because of the Government's intransigence. It is unnecessary, and it has always been unnecessary, because this matter could have been resolved with good will round the table, provided that the government recognised one thing: that the miners have a deep and abiding loyalty not only to their colleagues but to the industry. The mining communities believe that their industry is worth while. They have a belief in its future that the Government have failed to recognise. The Government seem to have a simple motto: if it stays still long enough, sell it. The coal mining industry is not for sale. It must be developed in the interests of society.

Long after the Government have left office, there will be a coal mining industry, because people such as the constituents whom I am proud to serve will have fought again and again to maintain it. They believe in its future, they recognise its potential, and they will give their all to develop it. It might be a nice new year gesture if the Government showed some confidence and faith in the industry, and tried to do something to support its future rather than seeking to destroy it at every turn.

2.12 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) on initiating a debate—I shall try not to stray from the subject—on Price Waterhouse and the sequestration of NUM assets. My hon. Friend, with his great knowledge of mining, expressed his view with sincerity of purpose. I know that his union and his mining friends appreciate his representation of them in the House. I was interested to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) sum up succinctly the legal technicalities, and I hope that the Solicitor-General's reply will show why the Prime Minister was able to give direct instructions that the costs of the firm trying to sequestrate the assets of the NUM would be met by the Treasury.

Will the Government be able to answer some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore)? If they are, as he suggests, infringing the laws of the country, is it not time that the House had an explanation of why, and who gives them the authority if they have it?

It is strange that in a similar case, affecting a different union, the Transport and General Workers Union, the Government have brought in William the Conqueror to rescue the Tory party and to assist the sequestration of funds from the TGWU. The *Morning Star* of Wednesday 12 December says that the High Court

"pulled an official White Rabbit out of the hat to extract £200,000 from the Transport and General Workers Union funds, without imposing sequestration."

The title of the court official discovered for this purpose is the Queen's Remembrancer, a title introduced by William the Conqueror. The Government are going back into the depths of history to find out different officers. Whenever I walk through the corridors of the Palace of Westminster, I am intrigued to find different people lurking around, but I have never found a Queen's Remembrancer. Can we have an explanation about this person. Who pays his salary? What does he get? According to the article in the *Morning Star*, the holder of

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this ancient office, is Mr. J. R. Bickford-Smith, a barrister and a master of the High Court, whose job is to remember and collect debts owed to the Crown.

The court's decision to avoid going through the procedure of sequestrating funds from Britain's biggest union, follows the undignified treatment of the receiver appointed to grab the miners' funds in Luxembourg. I ask for a reply from the Solicitor-General as to who the Queen's Remembrancer is, why he has been appointed, and why it was possible to appoint him before the Government brought in Price Waterhouse to sequestrate the funds of the NUM.

In the Welsh valleys, most of the striking miners have photocopies of the *Economist's* leaked version of the Ridley report. That shows clearly what the Tory party intends to do with the NUM and with the trade union movement, and what the Tory party in six years of office has accomplished. Things that were not in its manifesto are included in the Ridley report. This proves conclusively what we have said in the House over a number of years.

In March 1983, the then Secretary of State for Energy, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), gave the House a statement to say that he was appointing Ian MacGregor as the chairman of the NCB. He said:

"Accordingly, a fee of £1·5 million will be paid to Lazard Freres in compensation for the loss of Mr. MacGregor's service. Two thirds of that fee will be refundable on a pro rata basis if Mr. MacGregor does not complete his full three-year term."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 1983; Vol. 40, c. 19.]

Who on earth on the Government Benches, with all their directorships, managing directorships and ownership of many companies would have appointed any person to that type of job at that salary? How long would Government Ministers have allowed that person to remain in office? Mr. MacGregor was appointed on 1 December 1983, and, for 10 of the 14 months he has been in office, he has had the industry on stop. What private company would have allowed that to happen? What private company would have appointed Mr. MacGregor?

Many of my hon. Friends who have participated in this debate tonight asked questions about Mr. MacGregor's appointment when his appointment was announced to the House, and they are still asking questions. Was Mr. MacGregor appointed for the primary purpose of ensuring that the NUM was crushed? I know that the Prime Minister, Ministers and many Tories are still smarting at the result of the NUM's action during the term of the previous Tory Government. I regret the fact that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were not in the Chair when my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) described what is happening to the miners, their wives and children.

I shall be proud until my dying day that I was born the son of a miner in the Rhondda. Miners are the most compassionate race of people one could ever meet. I assure the House that in no way will the mining communities capitulate to threats from the Tory Government. For over half a century, the miners have endured suppression from the Tory Administration. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda stated, the miners will not capitulate to this Government, and the sooner the Government appreciate that fact and negotiate, the better.

Perhaps the Solicitor-General will read my speech on the motion to adjourn the House for the Christmas recess. I asked hon. Members to give two days of their holiday to discuss the miners' dispute. That might be the answer to the problem. If we are the legislators of this country, let us resolve this dispute. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) is the only Member who has tried to resolve this dispute. If the Government had taken the lead from my right hon. Friend, I am sure that the dispute would have been resolved long before now.

2.23 am

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): We are debating the intervention of Price Waterhouse which, before this case, was a firm of accountants unknown to the country at large, despite the fact that it controlled an empire worth £60 million a year. It is interesting to step back and to realise why the company became involved in the courts in the first place.

Price Waterhouse became involved because of the action of two scabs who took a case through the courts. They received funding from companies such as United Biscuits. On the secret advice—it later became public—of Mr. MacGregor and his runner, Mr. Hart, shuffling between Hobart house and 10 Downing street, those two individuals were advised to attack NUM funds. Along came Price Waterhouse. The debate correctly concentrates on the way in which Price Waterhouse attacks the NUM's assets.

Not just the NUM's assets are threatened by the work of Price Waterhouse. This week's *Militant* newspaper prints the letter from Price Waterhouse which has gone out to the general secretaries of every trade union. It demands of every trade union that they issue a report to Price Waterhouse stating the amount of each and every payment that they have made to the National Union of Mineworkers, and whether it was in cash and by way of a loan or gift. If payments were made by cheque, Price Waterhouse require sight or a copy of both sides of the cheques. It wants to know the person or persons to whom the payment was made, the purpose for which the money was used by the miners, whether it is intended to make any further payments with full particulars if they are. Price Waterhouse notes that it is authorised and commanded by the court to take into possession all the assets of the union and says that it intends to track down any money presently controlled by other trade unions which is destined for the NUM.

That is not just an attack on the NUM and its assets but a threat to the control of the funds of 10·5 million members of the Trade Union Congress and its affiliates.

All that Price Waterhouse obtained in the first instance was Lord Gormley's house and swimming pool, and about £8,000 in cash. The date upon which the decision was made to chase the rest of the union's money in Luxembourg is significant. It came at the end of the failure of another of the Coal Board's tactics, which was carried out on the Government's instructions. That was the so-called drift back to work.

The Secretary of State for Energy claimed as far back as July that 60,000 miners were at work. The NCB did not reach that figure until about the middle of November. We must recognise that today 90 per cent. of the miners in Scotland, 97 per cent. of the miners in Yorkshire and 99 per cent. of the miners in south Wales are on strike and have remained solid for nearly 10 months.

The carrot had failed. The bribes had failed. The sums of money that had been approved in the House at half-past one, two and three o'clock in the morning which gave

lump sum social security payments to miners to give up the jobs which belong rightly to the next generation in the mining areas leaving school had failed. The Government then thought that they should try the stick, and attack the union through its funds.

The Government used the same speed, prompted by the same obsession of the Prime Minister's, as they had used to attack miners' benefits when they tried to starve them back to work. Only a week ago I asked the Leader of the House in business questions, and the Treasury Bench in questions to the Chancellor immediately before, about the Government's intention to attack single striking miners over the housing benefit that it had been found they were entitled to claim for 10 months if they were paying rent to relatives when living at home. When I asked whether the Government intended to introduce regulations they hummed and hawed. They would not commit themselves. They made the regulations on 17 December; they laid them before Parliament on 18 December; and they came into operation on 19 December. During my brief membership of the House I had understood that there was normally a 21-day waiting period between regulations being laid and coming into operation.

When it comes to attacking the miners, by Price Waterhouse or by laying regulations on the Table, the Government are obsessed almost to the point of insanity with tracking down money which rightly belongs to the NUM or its members. Matters are entirely different when it comes to tax evasion or tax avoidance. There we see plans to close Inland Revenue offices and reduce the number of staff who tackle those who salt money away in Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man. Which nationally know firm of accountants was employed to track down Lord Vestey and his butchers when they paid only 10 quid in tax on £2·5 million profit, or whatever the precise figure was? Was Price Waterhouse brought in then? No. That is because he was a mate of the Tory party. It is a matter of class.

When workers and their money are involved, employ a £60 million firm of accountants to chase them, and give it all the resources it needs. When it is tax evasion and avoidance try to sweep it under the carpet and see whether the matter can be forgotten. That illustrates the political nature of tonight's discussion, and the class nature of the law in the way that it is being employed by the Tory Government at present.

The law is not neutral, not even in this hallowed Chamber where law is supposed to be made. We on the Labour Benches know that it is invented by those like the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The right hon. Gentleman invented it when he was Secretary of State for Employment and so did his predecessor. The law is administered by Tories like Lord Chief Justice Donaldson, who intervened in the battle of the National Graphical Association with Eddie Shah at Warrington. He tried to take the money of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers in 1972. He was the head of the industrial relations court in 1971. We are told that when someone puts on a piece of white fur he becomes a neutral Lord Chief Justice. The present Lord Chief Justice is a former Croydon Tory councillor and a past president of the Conservative and Unionist Association at Cambridge university. I do not believe that his decisions are entirely impartial and fair once he dons a wig. Let us remember that he was consorting with Ministers as recently as 36 months ago and planning recently enacted anti-trade union legislation.

The law is funded by political interests. United Biscuits funded Taylor and Foulstone, which initiated the action against the NUM, and that company funds the Tory party. It is one of the largest contributors to the Tory party. When it comes to selecting a sequestrator, the Government do not have the nouse to pick someone who does not have a political background. They picked a bloke called Brewer the first time round, the vice-chairman of the Hallam Conservative Association. How political can one get? However, the Government saw fit to pick a sequestrator with that sort of political background.

Of course, the Government have had the support of the newspapers. Virtually all the editors have been knighted by the Government. The legislation that we are discussing, which is being followed through by Price Waterhouse, has a political history. It was political when it was invented, administered and enforced.

The Tory Government have failed to crack the solidarity of the majority of miners. They have wasted £4,500 million and more in trying to defeat the NUM. That sum would enable the Government to reduce the burden of every taxpayer by £4 a week or to pay about £25 a week to every person on the dole. That is an example of the uneconomic terms of the strike. Apparently it is more economic to invest that sort of money to try to break the NUM than to give a decent sum to those who are on the dole. The money that the Government have spent in furtherance of the dispute would have been sufficient to provide a new general hospital as well as six new comprehensive schools and 1,000 council houses in each of 45 cities of the size of Coventry. Instead, the Government have spent the money in trying to break the NUM. In addition to the money that they have already spent, they are funding Price Waterhouse in pursuance of a vindictive court action.

The Government have tried to convince the miners that they were working in an uneconomic industry with uneconomic pits. That argument has failed. It is ironic that one of the five professors of accountancy who have destroyed that argument is a Price Waterhouse man at Manchester university. The Government selected a firm of accountants and one of its members scabbed on them by saying that their economic argument was up the chute. There has been a report from Dr. Andrew Glyn to the effect that their economic argument is up the chute. The Government have included the interest payments that they have received from the National Coal Board. They have included also the compensation payments that have been made to those whose homes have been destroyed by subsidence, especially in the Mansfield area. They have included the pensions paid to retired miners.

Even if the Government close every pit in Britain, they would still have to pay compensation for subsidence, pensions to former miners and interest charges on loans that have been guaranteed. How can those obligations be a charge on the present generation of miners? How can they be a charge on Cortonwood, Betteshanger or any of the other pits that are under threat? They should be a charge upon the Government and they should be borne by them. They should not be used in an attempt to prove that the industry is uneconomic.

The Government have tried to starve the miners back to work by cutting benefits. Benefits have been reduced

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to a level that is lower than those that would be paid to the families of murderers. They have tried to bludgeon the miners back by the use of the police.

As there are one or two faces in the Chamber that are new to the two debates on the miners that we have had in the past 10 months, I shall say again — it is worth repeating—that four months ago my sister had a baby. My brother-in-law is a member of the NUM. He is an electrician at the Selby coalfield. I visited my family at Selby a couple of days before the baby was born and we watched the television news together. At 20 minutes to six o'clock on the BBC news there was a report of seven policemen in the south being sent to arrest post office robbers who were known to be armed with sawn-off shotguns.

At 5.45 pm on ITV there was an entirely different story in the headlines. There were 1,000 policemen in riot gear on horseback with dogs, truncheons and shields escorting one man—Brian Green—into the Gascoigne Wood area of the Selby coalfield. When it comes to law and order, in the eyes of the Tory Government, it is a bigger crime to stand on the picket line and defend one's job and one's community than to use a sawn-off shotgun. In that case, one out of the seven policemen was shot in the groin and the head. He was put on a life-support machine, and subsequently died, yet more policemen were used to get one scab into a coalfield than were sent to arrest people known to have sawn-off shotguns.

If the fight goes on and the Government succeed in taking away the miners' money for the use of Price Waterhouse, that will not destroy the mood and morale of the NUM and its members, who are defending their communities and their jobs. The argument has nothing to do with economic or uneconomic pits. In the language of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, this is a battle to neuter and castrate the trade union movement, with the NUM being the first in line. The Tory Government think that if they can crack the NUM, the others will despair and be demoralised, and can be beaten. It will not work. The miners will not be defeated. In my area of Warwickshire, and in Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire and other areas, the miners will not be defeated.

The system lorded over by the Government is not working. Some 5 million are on the dole, 6 million live in damp houses, 9·7 million cannot afford a holiday away from home without staying with relatives, and 15 million are on or below the officially defined poverty line. Those are the economic reasons why the Government want to attack the trade union movement. Only the trade unions stand in the way of the working class being further pauperised and the Government enriching their own supporters.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nellist: No, because I am just about to finish.

That is the basis of the Government's decision to fund Price Waterhouse. If they can defeat the NUM, they think that they can carry that programme further. They are in for a shock. The miners will not be defeated.

2.37 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): At the beginning of the debate we were talking about Price Waterhouse having to go round the world trying to find the money. I said a few days ago, when the Attorney-General was not sick —I rather suspect that he is not today; he is dodging the column—that it was possible for Price Waterhouse to get the £200,000 without any problem, without travelling outside this country, because ever since the strike began those who have been working in Nottingham, south Derbyshire and Leicestershire have been paying their union contributions through the normal system to the NCB. The element of their contribution that would normally go as part of the imprest account to the NUM has not been sent, so the NCB has more than £200,000 of NUM money, national money, that it could have collected by a simple telephone call to two or three of the working areas, and that would have been the end of it.

If anybody has any doubts about what this business is all about, as many of my hon. Friends have said, it is about trying to cripple the NUM. The Government hope that if they can get away with that—which they will not—they can set upon the rest of the trade union movement, and trade unions will fall like a pack of dominoes. I shall tell the House what the sequestrators and the Government should be doing. It is time that they looked for the disappearing pound. It is 1·174 on today's exchanges against the dollar. It has dropped to the lowest point against all the currencies that are usually used for measuring the level of the pound.

Here we are, with a Government spending up to £5,000 million to try to crush the NUM, and the pound has reached its lowest ever level. In 1974, we defeated the Tory Government, who deliberately went to the country. The NUM did not force the election; the Tory Government decided on it. We defeated them then because the oil prices quadrupled. Would it not be ironic if, when we win this one, it is because the pound has fallen through the floor as oil prices have tumbled? As we watch the pound disappear, it will become clearer to the Government day by day that they will have to try to negotiate their way out of this mess. We have all heard about the Ridley plan. Everyone—even *The Economist*—knows what that was all about.

I will tell the House what I have learnt from this sequestration business, and I hope that the Labour Government will remember it in the future. If it is right to send Tory officials around the world as sequestrators looking for money that belongs to the working class, because it comes from working people's contributions, the Labour Government must be prepared to go after the Tory money that finishes up in foreign banks to avoid tax in Britain. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. There is always something that can be used. I warn the Solicitor-General that the time will come when we shall be following the money that the serried ranks of Tories put outside this country rather than pay their taxes in Britain to finance the Health Service and look after the old age pensioners.

Right from the start the Government, with their Fascist tendencies, set out to try to smash the unions, using the police force as the Prime Minister's private army and using the DHSS to starve little children. They have told the BBC that it will not get its licence fees unless it toes the Conservative line. "Speak for MacGregor or you won't get your increase", was the message to that element of the media which some people—I am not so stupid—believe to be impartial. Things are not very different with ITV. A film was commissioned from Ken Loach on the cultural

side of the strike. There were people reciting poems, two or three folk singers and a small contribution from me in a speech about Wordsborough. But as soon as they saw the film the Government, with their army of people at ITV, banned it from Britain's screens because it told a story about the pits that they did not want people to hear.

The Government have been using all the echelons of the establishment to try to crush the miners. They have sent stipendiary magistrates to Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire because they were not satisfied with magistrates born and bred in the mining communities. They have used judges to get innumerable writs and injunctions through the courts, brought by working miners on the advice of people straight from the Prime Minister's press office. Few Opposition Members and very few miners will ever again doubt that the arm of the executive and the judiciary are closely combined to try to smash the unions.

A Lloyds bank circular dated 22 November, immediately after sequestration, reads as follows:

"Any Branch holding an account . . . or assets in the names of the following, should report the full details immediately by telephone to the Chief Inspector's Department".

The list that follows begins with John Burrows. He is not on the national executive. He is a Derbyshire miners' official; Kenneth Homer is a Yorkshire miners' official; Nell Elizabeth Hyett is a press officer and has never been elected to any position in the NUM; Henry Richardson is a Nottinghamshire miners' official; Samuel Thompson is a Yorkshire miners' official; and so it goes on.

Those are the lengths to which the Government will go to try to crush the NUM, but we have drawn up a list of ideas that unions can use to get round the restrictions imposed by the courts. We are telling all the trade union executives to ignore the threats from all those involved in the sequestration of NUM funds by continuing to make large donations to the miners' solidarity fund and by offering the NUM large long-term interest-free loans. I want that written in *Hansard*. They should levy all trade union members at a rate of between 10p and 50p a week. They should collectively hire and pay the wages of all the staff employed by the NUM in all the coalfield offices, for the duration of the strike.

If the other trade unions do that, they can get round the sequestration order and help to finance a continuation of the NUM's tremendous and honourable battle. The battle is not about wages; it is not about greed; it is not about materialism; it is about the right to work and to stop the march forward to the dole queue.

We are calling upon trade unions to dodge the sequestration order by hiring staff on a consultancy basis so that NUM members can give advice—"advice" in inverted commas—to union officials. We ask them to purchase *The Miner* so that we can continue to get the message across, and to use transport to take people to demonstrations

Those are some of the things that the trade unions can do. They can also step up industrial action. It may well be that, in the new pay round that is beginning, the Government will not be as lucky as they have been during the past 40 weeks. There will be unions that decide that it would not be a bad idea to take on the Government, because the Government could not handle two major disputes at the same time. The Government will not continue to be as lucky as they have been throughout the dispute in that respect.

We are determined to fight on. The Government may think that they have everybody taped. They may think that they have their Back Benchers taped, as indeed they had them taped earlier today. They may think that they can bully their way through to success after success. They may think that luck will be on their side all the time. They may think that they can use the judiciary and the police. But the Government's luck will not last for ever. There will be a reckoning day. As a result of the Government's bullying, and their attacks on the trade union movement, the Government will fall.

The point of this debate is to mobilise support throughout the country, and that is the point of the collections that we make in every Tory constituency in the land. We went to Finchley the other day, to Madam Dross's constituency, and collected money there. We are sending money to the miners from every part of the land. We shall continue to collect that money in order to finance the strike and to provide the umbilical cord between the NUM and the rest of the working class. We will not allow the Government to cripple the NUM and to smash the trade union movement.

2.43 am

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I intervene briefly in this dispute to underline what my right hon. and hon. Friends have said in an important debate about a major industrial dispute. The debate arose on the Price Waterhouse situation. I have some evidence for saying that, after being appointed to do the job, Price Waterhouse realised what problems it was up against and what difficulties there would be in chasing the money. I do not believe that Price Waterhouse was influenced by the cost. I believe that the firm made it clear to the Government that the game was not worth the candle and that it was tiring of the situation. The Government realised that if Price Waterhouse withdrew as sequestrator, the matter would go back to the courts and another problem would be created. The Government therefore told Price Waterhouse that it must carry out the court's injunction and that they would indemnify the company for any costs that were incurred.

When he made his statement a few days ago, the Attorney-General talked about a cost of £50,000. The company's fees last year were in excess of £62 million. The Solicitor-General must explain why the Government should, quite unprecedentedly, intervene in a legal decision.

A Minister from the Department of Energy should have been present to hear the debate. My right hon. and hon. Friends have rightly linked the debate with the dispute. That is what it is all about and why Price Waterhouse has been involved. The dispute has now been going on for 10 months. It is a major dispute and, in my opinion, quite unnecessary. It has been created by the NCB's decision of 6 March to make proposals which, in the current financial year, would have meant the loss of 20,000 jobs and the closure of 20 pits. That is what is on the table. The NUM has no demands on the table. This is an argument about not wages or hours, but jobs. It is an argument about the preservation of jobs and of communities, but it does not stop with those 20,000 jobs and 20 pits.

Several reports have questioned the accountancy. We have had the reports of accountants, of the London Business School and of "Diverse Reports" on television recently, which made it clear that not 20,000 but 70,000 jobs and 70 pits are involved. That would represent a

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reduction of the industry from about 180,000 jobs to 100,000. If that reduction took place and the industry were concentrated solely where there are new pits and where there is new investment, the result would be death for the coalfields of south Wales, Lancashire, Kent, parts of Yorkshire, Scotland and the north-east. The new areas receive 81 per cent. of the investment. The remaining 19 per cent. goes to other areas.

In that regard, the question "What is an uneconomic pit?" is brought into the open. If we exclude pits that the NUM agrees should be excluded because they have been exhausted and pits out of which it is geologically impossible to get coal, what is an uneconomic pit? If the investment and the priority are given, the coal can be got and there is no such thing as an uneconomic pit.

Mr. Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Orme: I should like to develop my argument. I should have liked to exchange views with the hon. Gentleman, but I must finish in a couple of minutes.

I believe that there is a basis for a negotiated settlement of the dispute. Last Friday, the TUC put forward sensible and positive suggestions. It asked the Government to reconvene talks, which the NUM was prepared to attend, but the Government said no.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Orme: No, I will not.

In my opinion, the Government do not want a settlement of this dispute. They are deliberately allowing it to continue into next year. They want to see a victory over the NUM, but neither I nor my hon. Friends believe that they will achieve that victory. The sooner they realise that, the better for them and the country.

We are now going down a very dangerous road. That is why some of us have worked night and day to try to resolve this dispute on a basis which is honourable and acceptable to the NUM and to the other bodies involved. If the Government do not take heed of what I am saying, some of these problems will come home to roost in 1985.

The Government may think that they are winning, but they are not. Having gone into the coalfields, I know that the miners who are out will stay out. They will fight, and that fight will be increasingly understood by the people of the country. The Government should act now. If they do not, be it on their head if there is a continuation of the dispute well into 1985.

2.56 am

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): It is a matter of great regret to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General that on the clearest medical advice he is unable to be here tonight. On 11 December he returned for a day or two only from a period of absence due to sickness, and I regretted the slur cast upon him in the recent speech of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who suggested that by his absence the Attorney-General was dodging the column.

Mr. Skinner: The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not believe the miners, and the Attorney-General is not on supplementary benefit.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: However, in a spirit of realism, I did not find that suggestion any less fantastic or unrealistic than many others which graced the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I shall begin with a few comments about the writ and procedure of sequestration in the context of contempt of court—*[Interruption.]* I shall then describe briefly the special status—*[Interruption.]* I wonder whether Labour Members are really concerned about the matter we have been discussing. If so, I hope that they will listen, but I have some time left and I shall continue whatever the noise. I shall say a little about the special status and the function of the Attorney-General in matters that concern contempt of court. I shall briefly review the history of the action in which these proceedings against the NUM for contempt of court have culminated in the appointment of sequestrators by the High Court. I shall then recount in outline the matters which led to the Attorney-General's intervention, and describe the power under which it was taken. I shall also deal with the questions which have been asked, but given the shortness of time, if I omit some I shall endeavour to deal with them by correspondence.

From that I anticipate that it will be apparent for those with ears to hear that my right hon. and learned Friend acted with entire constitutional propriety, and that the attacks made upon him have been intemperate and unfounded.

Sequestration is a method by which a court enforces its judgments and orders by proceeding against the property of a person who is in contempt of court. It is a procedure of contempt of court. It can be employed by a court only where the person against whom it is employed is in contempt by disobedience of an order of the court. The purpose of sequestration is to enable the court to force a person in contempt of court to purge his contempt.

Mr. Ray Powell *rose*——

The Solicitor-General: I have sat for three hours listening to the debate. I have 12 minutes in which to answer. I propose to do so and to address myself to the real issues. I come now to the status and function of the Attorney-General in matters which concern contempt of court. Holders of his office have traditionally had a role in cases of contempt of court. It was described by Lord Diplock in a quite recent case in the House of Lords—the Attorney-General *v.* Times Newspapers in 1973. Lord Diplock commended the practice adopted since 1954 whereby the Attorney-General accepts the responsibility of receiving complaints of contempt of court from parties in litigation and of making an application in his official capacity for committal of the offender if he believes this course to be justified in the public interest. Lord Diplock used these words:

"He"—

meaning the Attorney-General—

"is the appropriate officer to represent the public interest in the administration of justice. In doing so he acts in constitutional theory on behalf of the Crown, as do Her Majesty's judges themselves, but he acts on behalf of the Crown as the fountain of justice and not in the exercise of its executive function".

I come next to the appointment of sequestrators. Sequestrators were appointed by Mr. Justice Nicholls in the case of *Taylor*. The reason was that the union had not paid a fine imposed upon it by the court. The court therefore, in the exercise of its jurisdiction, appointed the sequestrators to seize the assets of the union in order to oblige the union to pay its fines. The hon. Member for

Ogmore (Mr. Powell) asked why the Queen's Remembrancer procedure could not have been used. It was a method that could have been used but the court chose to use sequestrators. Either procedure was available. The court is not controlled by the Government. The court has a completely untrammelled and independent jurisdiction. Mr. Justice Nicholls fined the NUM £200,000 on 10 October for contempt of court. He ordered that if the fine was not paid within 14 days he would consider ordering sequestration. That is what Mr. Justice Nicholls did.

I turn to the circumstances that led to the giving of the indemnity. By 12 November only about £8,500 of NUM assets had been seized by the sequestrators. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) asked whether or not certain properties are owned by the NUM. To our knowledge there are two. There may be more; I know of no others. Those properties are owned or lived in by Mr. Daly and Lord Gormley. They were known at the time of the Attorney-General's statement to be the property of the NUM, but my right hon. and learned Friend's statement was perfectly accurate. He said that they set about taking possession of the assets and that they had been able to seize assets only to the value of about £8,500. The vast majority of the remaining assets of the union, amounting to many millions of pounds, had been transferred by the union to banks in various foreign countries.

In proceedings taken in Dublin the sequestrators obtained an interim injunction in their action to secure funds that had been lodged in Dublin. The Dublin High Court had given an interim injunction and the sequestrators had obtained the agreement of the Irish judge to accept a bond for £2,500 to be paid for out of the sequestrated assets. The sequestrators undertook to use their best endeavours to find such a bond, but they experienced difficulty in finding insurers who would provide a bond in the market. A bond was ultimately obtained, but only after the indemnity was offered by the Attorney-General.

At that point, the sequestrators approached the court that had appointed them, and I understand that they expressed some concern that they were being asked to provide a bond and might be exposed to personal liability. They learnt from the court that it had no funds of its own. Learning of that—I hope that the House has expressed a genuine interest in what happened, because it is on that basis that I am endeavouring to give an accurate account of what occurred—the Attorney-General spoke to the senior sequestrator, Mr. Larkin, and learnt that the sequestrators had set aside £50,000 of their own money to be spent before they would go back to the court. In the opinion of the Attorney-General, it was on the cards that if that money were spent and no money from which the sequestrators could be reimbursed had been seized, they would go back to the court to seek a discharge.

It was as a result of that discussion about the difficulties facing the sequestrators that the Attorney-General decided that it would be in the public interest to offer the indemnity to cover the sequestrators' reasonable and proper costs.

I have been asked about consultation, and the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh) asked whether, as he put it, the Prime Minister had any part. The Attorney-General was obliged to consult Ministers to discover whether the contingent liabliliy might be imposed on the Treasury. Following that discussion and consultation, he offered the indemnity, in the circumstances that he has already described to the House.

I have been asked by what authority the Crown is entitled to give that indemnity. The answer is that it was given under the common law powers of the Crown, which has the same freedom as any individual in the realm to give an indemnity unless precluded by statute. There is no such statute——

Mr. Welsh: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All I asked was whether the Prime Minister was involved. The Solicitor-General will not answer that question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): That is a matter for the Solicitor-General.

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked about the Crown——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: And the bond.

The Solicitor-General: I have already said that a bond was ultimately obtained for £2,500, which is what was sought by the Irish court. However, it was obtained only after the indemnity had been put forward.

I said that the Crown's power derives from the common law and there is no statute in this case precluding the issuing of an indemnity by the Crown. It is entitled to take that action. Before any money can be paid under the indemnity, the Crown must get statutory authority, which is why a Consolidation Fund Act would be required if the money had to be paid.

On behalf of the Attorney-General, I want to make it clear what the argument is. My right hon. and learned Friend has been subjected tonight, in his absence, to attacks that reflect on his honour. *[Interruption.]* I wish to to have an opportunity to reply to them — *[Interruption.]* I shall reply to them, whatever the noise. Whatever issues this matter gives rise to, they will not be illuminated by my being shouted at by Opposition Members.

Mr. Rogers: They are certainly not being illuminated by the Solicitor-General.

The Solicitor-General: Any Law Officer has to exercise his special jurisdiction as a guardian of the public interest and, indeed, his judicial jurisdiction in such a way as to exclude any consideration of party partisanship. That is fundamental to our arrangements. No Law Officer needs to have that pointed out. Any Law Officer knows that his decisions may be attacked as being improperly taken. I do not credit the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) with the common courtesy of having given my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General notice of what he was going to say.

Mr. Sedgemore: I expected him to be here for the debate.

The Solicitor-General: I do not credit the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch with having given him notice as the conventions——

Mr. Sedgemore: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Solicitor-General to attack an hon. Member for not having given notice, when in the normal course of events the Attorney-General could be expected to reply to the debate? Cannot we have a modicum of common sense from the Solicitor-General?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I remind hon. Members that the debate has less than one minute to go.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch knows that he should have given notice, even if the Attorney-General was here. I say only that his allegations against my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General inspire in me a contempt very different in character from that with which we have been dealing.

Never before, to my knowledge, has there been a precedent for this—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—but never has there been a precedent when a fine imposed by a court has been defeated, defied and frustrated by moving the assets overseas. This was an unprecedented strategy and it demanded an unprecedented intervention in the exercise of an undoubted jurisdiction by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. The attacks on the propriety of his actions and of the courts I reject utterly; and I reject them with profound scorn.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I take the hon. Gentleman's point of order, I must remind him that we are now in private Member's time. Any time now taken up will come off the time allotted to another hon. Member who has been fortunate in the ballot.

Mr. Nellist: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have presided over much of a very serious and important debate on the funds of a national trade union and on the effects for its members. During that debate, and particularly during the concluding speech of the Solicitor-General, two Tory Members were in the Chamber: one was in a penguin suit and he passed out during the debate. That does not show any respect to the Chair, or to the seriousness of the debate. That hon. Gentleman was the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Water Charges

3.12 am

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): I am pleased to have this chance to raise the question of how we charge for the supply of water. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is in the Chamber, and I hope that he will be replying to the debate. He has a keen interest in the water industry and, of course, in the environment. I look forward with special pleasure to his contribution.

I shall concentrate on water authority charges that are levied on the domestic consumer in England. I want to dwell on how those charges are levied rather than on the absolute level. I believe that there is a widely-held feeling of injustice, and that that has become much more apparent since the separation of water rates from the general municipal rate—a process that began in 1974. I and many other hon. Members are well aware of the fact that our constituents are basically discontented about the method of assessing water charges by using the rateable value of the consumer's property. Many consumers believe that that method is inaccurate and discriminatory.

We understand that water charges are likely to rise in the next financial year by somewhere between 8 and 13 per cent. In my area, the Anglian water authority warns of a rise of about 13 per cent. Those increases will only accentuate the inequities of the present method of charging.

I do not want to concentrate in this debate on the reasons for the increase in water rates, except in passing to refer my hon. Friend the Minister to the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, on which I serve, which reported on 3 December. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to paragraphs 51 and 52 and simply read out the relevant sentences. In paragraph 51 the Committee says:

"We consider that it is unnecessarily disruptive to increase industry's rate of return over such a short period."

The Committee is referring to the fact that the targets for the water industry are to be increased from approximately 1 per cent. rate of return on the assets valued at replacement cost to something like 1·9 per cent. over a four-year period.

In paragraph 52 the Committee concluded:

"the time has come for a re-appraisal of the relative rates of return for all nationalised industries."

Those two recommendations are apposite to the water industry. I hope that we can return at some other suitable time to debate the way in which the water industry finances itself and the level of charges. But that is not my concern in this debate. My concern is how we charge for water, not what we charge.

The Water Act 1973 required the industry by April 1981 to ensure that its charging policy should be so organised and arranged that there should be no undue preference towards and no discrimination against any class of persons. That laudable aim has never been fulfilled.

By 1980 the National Water Council, which has now disappeared, in considering the basis of charging for water, baulked at the introduction of metering. It said:

"Neither the economic benefits nor the benefit to consumers justify a commitment to universal metering at present."

How it could have reached that firm conclusion without evidence and extensive trials I do not know, but that was the conclusion then.

By the time we came to the 1983 general election it had become clear that there would be no wholesale reform of the rating system. Therefore, the pressure on the water industry to come up with an alternative method of charging had disappeared.

Since 1981 the Government have supported the earlier recommendation of the National Water Council, that the best way to proceed was optional, not universal, metering. Optional metering is unjust because the choice of installing meters is only really available to the comparatively rich, and certainly the careful and diligent. The present policy of optional metering does not answer the basic charge of inequity in the system.

I welcome the decision recently announced by the Government to establish a steering group, headed by the chairman of the Thames water authority, which is to report early in 1985 on the possible extension of domestic universal metering. Attitudes may be ready for change, and I welcome that.

It may be helpful to comment briefly on the present tariff and to note that the water industry has introduced standing charges and increased those standing charges as part of the total water bill in recent years. Essentially, the argument is that by introducing standing charges—fixed amounts—which the customer has to pay in addition to an assessment on the rateable value of his house, the inequity is to some extent modified. That may be true, but it is not a satisfactory answer to the basic charge of the inequity of the present system.

One might believe that people, being encouraged by the water authorities and the Government to opt to install meters, would do so with great alacrity and enthusiasm. That is not the case. Figures show that less than 1 per cent. of domestic households are metered.

Why is there such a lack of enthusiasm? There are two reasons. The first is the lack of promotion by the water authorities. The second, and probably more important, reason is the relatively high cost of installing a meter. At present, the installation and associated costs must be paid by the consumer up front, and those charges can be significant.

The case for universal metering for domestic consumers rests on three arguments. The first is equity. To charge by the rateable value method is grossly unfair, as I shall illustrate. Two families may live in similar houses next door to each other. A retired couple may live in one and a large family in the other. The large family may own two motor cars, if both husband and wife are working, and there may be a line of nappies out each day. I do not make a judgment on the relative social importance of both families, but their water charges are likely to be the same, although it is clear which family consumes most water. The method of charging is, therefore, unfair.

Secondly, universal metering would provide a better control of leakage. Experts in the industry estimate that water authorities lose about 25 per cent. of the total water supply before it is consumed in the household. The Government fully accept that figure. Leakage often goes beyond the curtilage of the household and the tap. That is a large percentage. With universal domestic metering, the chances of identifying and controlling leakage would be enhanced, but it would take time. Until we have electronic remote reading, it is unlikely that the householder will be able to detect leakage promptly and that the water authority will be able to put the pipes in good working order as quickly as it would otherwise do.

Thirdly, universal metering would have the value of introducing the price mechanism. The water industy should be regarded in the same way as the electricity and gas industries. The price mechanism should be available to match supply and demand. If we had universal metering, some of the investment decisions made in past years, including the Kielder project in Northumberland, might not have been made. The water authorities would have had better economic information against which to measure likely future demand.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) says that the Kielder system is good. If he studies the use of the reservoir in recent years, he will agree, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing said, either that over-provision was made for Kielder or that the reservoir was built too early. I make no specific comment. I merely point out that, with the availability of price mechanism in the water industry, investment decisions could be more carefully taken.

The Government said that this year about £230 million is to be spent on reservoir construction. How is that large sum to be spent without the necessary information that other utilities have about the interplay between supply and demand provided by price mechanism? As financial pressures on the consumer mount, with higher water rates next year and perhaps in future years, the only equitable tariff structure would be one using universal meter.

I shall briefly mention the three principal arguments used against universal metering. The first is that it is regressive. However, social inequalities should be corrected by the welfare state, not by cross-subsidisation by the utility.

The second argument relates to public health. It is said that, with universal metering, some consumers would make false economies — reduce their consumption of water excessively and so endanger their health. There may be something in that argument. If we have a programme of universal metering, it must be introduced gradually and with a careful review of its public health impact.

The final argument against universal metering is that it is inordinately expensive. The present costs of optional metering are not directly relevant to an assessment of whether the nation should embrace universal metering and whether the Government should encourage it, largely because the economies of scale in a programme of universal metering would be such that present estimates of the cost of installing a meter to the consumer who has an option would not be relevant. The announcement of a universal metering programme would so stimulate the research into and development of new meters and methods of installation that costs would be reduced in that direction. The installation of meters could be privatised with benefit, as was the case with conversions to North sea gas. Private contractors could be charged with the responsibility for introducing meters on an area-by-area basis, and consumers could be asked to pay the cost, through the water authorities, during a 10 or 20-year period, rather than to pay the cost up-front, as is the case at present.

The reading of meters is expensive because it is carried out by inspectors on a meter-by-meter basis. If we have universal metering, there should be joint reading of gas, electricity and water meters, and eventually the introduction of electronic remote meter reading, which

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

would revolutionise the way in which the customer and the utilities could mutually control the supply of water, gas and electricity.

To sum up the economic case, I believe that when the National Water Council, in 1980, estimated that a saving of about 20 per cent. in domestic usage would be needed to justify universal metering, it was being too pessimistic. It said that the cost to the nation, and the cost to be borne by the consumer, could be justified only if consumption were reduced by 20 per cent. I believe that, because of the economies of scale argument that I have deployed and because of new techniques and meter designs, that figure is far too high. I would put it closer to 10 per cent. All the experience in Britain and other countries is that universal metering causes a reduction of at least 10 per cent. in consumption. Hence, the costs of metering could be paid easily.

I encourage the Government to consider a rolling programme of compulsory universal metering, to be paid for by the consumer over a long period, with the installation of new meters being performed by private plumbing contractors under the supervision and control of the water authorities. Initially the meters should be read jointly with the other utilities, but, in the long run, we should encourage the introduction of electronic remote meter reading, as that would enable both the consumer and the utility to control better the supply of this valuable and scarce resource. The time is now ripe for a new approach.

3.30 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I apologise to the House and to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) for the fact that I missed the first few moments of his speech.

Water charges concern us all. I have one particular problem, to which I should like to draw the attention of the House. My hon. Friend touched briefly on reservoir building programmes and how they can affect water charges, and as I come from the west country, that theme strikes a particular chord with me. The House will be aware of the problems that there have been in that area. I shall not detain the House by cataloguing the various miseries that we in the west have undergone. To draw the strands together, I remind the House that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction was in the west country this summer, standing in the middle of a reservoir, which was completely devoid of water, and which looked like a lunar landscape. The irony was that as he stood there, he had an umbrella over his head because it was raining.

The privations that we have undergone in terms of water shortages probably exceed, or at least equal, anything that any other part of the country has undergone. However, the end to these problems is in sight, because we are now to have our third strategic reservoir. When the Roadford reservoir is finally built, it will be approximately 15 years after the South-West water authority first asked that it should be provided. It will be 25 years after the predecessor authority identified the need for that reservoir. Although the end is in sight, it has not yet come, and when it does, it will not be a moment too soon.

The subject of this reservoir is directly referrable to water charges, through an unusual way. One of the consequences that loss of regional status will have for the south-west of England will be on the way that the reservoir is funded. In turn, that will have an effect on water charges. Already, the South-West water authority is contemplating increasing water charges by at least twice the rate of inflation, and possibly by three times the rate of inflation. Therefore, anything that increases that process has a bearing on the water charges in the west country.

I am sure that I would be ruled out of order at once if I tried to twist the debate round, and made it a debate about the loss of regional aid in the west country, so I shall not do that. However, the direct effects that that has on Roadford are that whereas the South-West water authority could have expected at least £17 million in grant towards the project, it will now receive about £8 million, which is a loss £9 million. It has been receiving grants of £3 million a year for various projects, and that will go as well. There is some doubt about whether the authority will still be able to go to the European Investment Bank, from which it has already borrowed £35 million on rather advantageous terms and with which it is negotiating to obtain more.

One way in which that problem could be redressed would be if the water authority's capital programme were increased. I am aware, and I am grateful for it, that there has been a relaxation already, and that the Minister has said that the water authority can increase its capital programme by about £2 million. Even £2 million a year over the next three years will be more than accounted for by what is necessary to be able to implement the Control of Pollution Act 1974, an Act that was passed in times that were less frugal than ours. Although that makes some contribution, it does not begin to reduce the problems about Roadford that face us.

The people of the west country are in a unique position when considering the problems they have faced because of water shortages. Water is a regional resource, funded on a regional basis. That is the policy, and so be it. Many of the problems of the west country stem from the massive influx of tourism and the demand for water resources generally. It is at least arguable that we must examine the problem faced by the South-West water authority. We must do so, if not on a national basis, then on something approaching a national basis. I should like to believe that it may be possible to do something on a national basis to help the south-west to alleviate its problems with the Roadford reservoir.

In asking for an increase in the capital programme or for some other gesture by central Government to provide an exceptional course of action, I am saying that the west country is faced with an exceptional problem. People will be unhappy if they see, this late in the day, that the withdrawal of regional aid will mean that the long-awaited reservoir may impose, even now, an even greater burden in terms of water charges.

Obviously, regional aid and the effect on the various regions if it were withdrawn has been carefully considered by Government. I wonder whether anyone realised, at the time the measure was applied to the west country, its effect on the building of our third reservoir. Perhaps all too often people expect Government to be able to anticipate everything. I suspect that in this case the effect was not realised. An exceptional problem will probably now call for an exceptional remedy.

3.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) for raising an important subject in a national and a parochial sense. The remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge will be noted. He comes from a region of the United Kingdom which has been perhaps most adversely affected by the lack of water supplies for a long time. I believe that my hon. Friend knows that I am a part-time resident of the south-west and am well aware of the great difficulties suffered by people in the region. I pay tribute to the water authority, especially to its chairman, Mr. Len Hill. I am also well aware of the privations suffered by the people. We understand fully what those people have had to put up with. I commend them for their tremendous efforts in overcoming the difficulties in the summer months. I hope that, by the end of this decade, the provision of additional facilities will guarantee that tourists who flood into that region will no longer cause the imbalance that occurred during the past two or three decades.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering about the price mechanism and people's attitude when there is a widely held feeling of injustice is absolutely right. The problem faced by the centre and by the water authorities in presenting their case is to explain how charges are levied and how they have built up so swiftly during the past 10 years.

I do not want to be drawn into the problems of the Kielder dam. That case was based mainly on industrial demand growth forecasts. Such demand is already metered. Those of us who are concerned about overprovision in some regions must bear in mind the fact that reservoirs have a great deal to offer other than the major provision of water. They can provide a great diversification of interests for many people. That will be one of the attractive features that will assist the south-west of England. I can understand the anxieties of conservationists, but I believe that they must look wider to ascertain what greater diversification can mean.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My wife and I visited the area in the summer, and we were most impressed by what the people had done there.

Mr. Macfarlane: Those of us who have visited the area are well aware of what the hon. Gentleman has just said. There is a greater range of diversification.

I greatly welcome the opportunity to respond to the most interesting speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering. He opened this debate by raising the question of metered charging for water. That is an important question and it is very timely for hon. Members to be giving it their attention. As my hon. Friend said, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction has announced a new study of metering, under the leadership of Roy Watts, the chairman of Thames water. A first report is expected early next year. My Department will treat that with great urgency.

My hon. Friend referred to the disappointing outcome of previous studies under the auspicies of the former National Water Council. I share something of his sense of disappointment, but I think that it is important not to underestimate the significance of the fact that the option of a meter, and hence of a volume-related charge, is now available to every consumer who cares to take advantage of it. The main reason for not going further up to now has been the dauntingly high cost of universal metering, which he mentioned. The meters are not expensive — perhaps £10 to £15 — but installation can cost significantly more, and those figures, when applied to some 18 million households, lead one to very large sums of money. Private contractors normally install meters and that is something of which we take note. Whoever picks up the bill, it is obviously right to ensure that outlays of that order are well justified.

However, there have been developments which could favour greater use of metering in the future — for example, better technology, with the possibility of remote reading; the opportunity to take a new look at the savings that might result, whether from reduced leakage or postponement of major investments; and the authorities' positive interest in achieving a more businesslike relationship with their customers. I look forward to the results of the study now being undertaken by Roy Watts, and I assure hon. Members that I and my colleagues in the Department will keep the House informed of progress. We treat the review seriously and with urgency.

The subject of water charges is well chosen, for it is one which arouses much anxiety. It has aroused much press speculation which has been wrongly directed in recent months.

I am glad to have this opportunity to help my hon. Friends understand better what the Government have decided for water investment and water charges. I hope that what I say will prove a useful antidote to some of the more alarmist rumours that are being circulated. There have been some rather one-sided publicity campaigns.

One water authority has indeed gone so far as to offer hon. Members floating lectures on current cost accounting, with floating refreshments, on our very doorstep. That makes it all the more necessary to give Members a balanced account of the position.

Desirable objectives for the water industry include, first, higher investment to deal with problems and to raise standards, which have been lacking for several decades; secondly, greater efficiency to keep costs as low as possible; thirdly, a reasonable rate of return on the assets employed in the industry; fourthly, moderate charges increases; and, fifthly, a reduction in borrowing requirements, which count as public expenditure.

The problem is to arrive at a proper balance between those objectives. Higher investment has to be financed; and a low rate of return may help to keep charges down, but it can only add to the financing problem.

In recent years we have given priority to efficiency improvement. I am pleased to say that the response of the industry has been good. The performance aims agreed for 1983-84, which were to get real operating costs below their 1979-80 level, were bettered by about £10 million. New performance aims to bring further real cost reductions over the three years to 1986-87 have been agreed. Manpower in the water authorities is now 15 per cent. below 1979 levels. The new smaller boards which took office in October last year have brought a new dimension and a more businesslike approach to the management of the authorities. Hon. Members will appreciate the importance of good management when I remind them of

[Mr. Macfarlane]

the size of this industry: turnover about £2 billion; net assets about £30 billion; annual investment over £700 million. I commend what the authorities have recently achieved and look forward with confidence to further progress in the future.

It was a previous Government who, between 1974 and 1979, reduced water services investment by half. However, since 1982, water investment has been on a rising trend because the reduction in inflation — particularly the steadiness of contract prices for construction work—has enabled the water authorities to do more work within the cash limit. In 1983-84 water investment in England was planned to be £672 million, but the outturn was £711 million. This year the planned figure is £686 million, but again the indications are that a higher level will be achieved.

I am sure that hon. Members need no reminding of the importance of the investment programmes of the water authorities. I think that this goes to the heart of some of the problems in post-war Britain. Although water resources schemes amount to less than 5 per cent. of water investment, this includes projects like the Roadford reservoir in the south-west, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge referred, where the drought this summer stretched resources to the limit.

In water supply and distribution, we are fortunate in having 99 per cent. of the population receiving a piped supply of potable water. But the conditions of the mains in some areas gives cause for concern and there are quality problems — discoloration, rising nitrate concentrations and plumbo solvency, for example — which require attention and expenditure.

Worries about crumbling sewers have attracted much attention, but these problems can be overstated. I remind hon. Members that nearly half of our sewers are of post-world war 2 vintage and that the failure rate nationally is only about 16 events per 1,000 km per year, of which three quarters affect pipes of less than 9 in. diameter. Nevertheless, there are undoubted problems of deterioration in some regions, notably the north-west and Yorkshire. In other regions, new development has increased the load to be carried by the sewers beyond the design capacity so that foul flooding can occur when there is heavy rainfall.

The right approach to these problems is to press on with survey programmes in critical areas, which the authorities have been doing for some years. This year has seen the publication of the Water Research Centre's sewerage rehabilitation manual, which will help to put that work on a more systematic basis. Often the survey results are reassuring rather than the reverse, but, where problems are identified, the authorities provide in their investment plans for necessary remedial work.

Sewage treatment and disposal is the other main investment requirement. River quality improvement and upgrading of estuaries depend to a large extent on further improvements in sewage treatment works. Similarly, improvement in coastal waters may require long sea outfalls. Hon. Members will have noted the Government's recent response to the 10th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, published as pollution paper No. 22. That says:

"The Government have told water authorities that . . . they intend that there should be a significant increase in their investment thus reversing the previous trend. An important purpose is to provide for a faster rate of improvement in the aquatic environment generally, including estuarine and coastal waters on a priority basis."

This is one part of a larger change in our policy. The Government have reviewed their stragegy for water services investment and their financing. Their decisions are reflected in the external financing cash limit for 1985-86, which was announced in the Autumn Statement. The Government now wish to see an increase in investment in the water industry so as to make more progress with the maintenance and renewal of sewers and water mains and to secure further improvements in the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters. We want to see the rate of return on water authority assets at a higher rate than the present average of about 1 per cent., and a reduction in water authorities' borrowing. For the English authorities, the increase in investment in 1985-86 is expected to be about £80 million to £769 million—both figures excluding land drainage. Future years' figures are provisional but should be about £820 million in 1986-87 and £870 million in 1987-88.

Financial targets will be set to raise the average rate of return achieved by the water authorities from its present average of about 1 per cent. to about 1·4 per cent. next year, 1·7 per cent. in 1986-87 and 1·9 per cent. in 1987-88. That will be done by setting targets for individual authorities so as to secure a 5 per cent. return on new investment from 1 April 1985 while raising the rate of return on assets existing at that date to about 1·75 per cent. by 1987-88. The targets will differ from authority to authority because of differences in the rate of return presently being earned and because of differences in investment levels, but the policy will be applied to all authorities.

The effect of these policies will be to enable the English water authorities' new net borrowing, excluding Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food grants for land drainage, to be reduced from £237 million this year to £169 million in 1985-86, with further reductions in later years. The position will again vary from authority to authority, with some still borrowing in 1987-88 and others repaying debt, as Thames water is doing already. The higher financial targets will inevitably mean charges rising above the general rate of inflation. The figures that my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering quoted in his opening remarks, when he said that there were variations between 8 per cent. and 13 per cent., are about right.

It is the cash generated by higher charges that enables higher investment to be funded and borrowing to be reduced. It is difficult to forecast precisely the increases that will be necessary, because they depend on real operating costs in each authority, including savings due to efficency improvements and cost inflation, as well as on the financial targets set by the Government. But the precise effect will become evident only as authorities set their budgets in about February each year. Our present best estimate is that the average increase may be about 5 per cent. above general inflation in 1985-86 and rather less in 1986-87 and 1987-88. There will be differences between regions, with relatively low increases in areas where efficiency savings are large — for example, in the Thames water authority area — or where investment is not increasing, as in the Northumbrian area.

Before concluding, I should like to say that I do not see how rates of return of between 1 and 2 per cent., as has

been said in some quarters, can constitute "monopoly exploitation" or "back-door taxation". They clearly do not. We have absolutely no intention of privatising the water industry. The Government have no plans to urge that upon the water authorities. There has been some press speculation about it in the past, but there is no intention to do so.

The average household bill this year is about £78, or 21p per day, so, if next year's increase is 10 per cent., it is an extra 2p a day. I do not believe that those are large sums when one considers the services provided—not just water supply, but sewerage, sewage treatment, facilities for water recreation and sea defence—and the enormous infrastructure of assets that has to be maintained, renovated or extended to keep those services at a high standard.

Several points were raised by both my hon. Friends. In the interest of time, I hope that they will allow me to write to them when I shall take up those points. These are serious and important issues. However, I believe that the targets that we have now set throughout the rest of the decade will ensure that there is a strategy for the water industry, and that can only be good for the consumer and the United Kingdom.

Miss Hilda Murrell (Murder)

3.51 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): There are several subjects that I care about, such as the financing of the BBC, teachers' pay, service and conditions, Scotland and Ethiopia. So, I shall be rapid and succinct on this subject.

I did not know the late Miss Hilda Murrell personally—though as a gardener, and sometime beekeeper, I am, of course, familiar with the beautiful rose to which she gave her name. On 24 March of this year, her body was found in a wood just outside Shrewsbury. She was in her 79th year, and had been dead for some time. On 5 December, 1984, the inquest was held in Shrewsbury. A verdict of unlawful killing was brought in, and the coroner thanked all those involved. End of the matter? Just another statistic among unsolved murders? Well, no, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The police are quoted as saying that the facts are still being held back, on the grounds that it is necessary to keep them out of the press, as the murderer has not been caught. The police version of some wandering "nutter"-type burglar breaking in, and then attacking the lady when she came home unexpectedly, does not tally in any way with what was obviously a sophisticated break-in, with a purpose that was not conventional burglary.

My interest in the case of the late Miss Murrell was aroused in mid-November when I was told, anonymously, that I ought to read carefully an article in the *New Statesman*, of 9 November, 1984, entitled the "Death of Miss Murrell", by Judith Cook. Knowing that Hugh Stephenson, editor of the *New Statesman*, would not have given the article such prominence without reason—I am a *New Statesman* subscriber — and knowing that anything under the by-line of Judith Cook is worth my attention, I did so. I do not doubt that those who brief the Minister have shown him Judith Cook's article.

Approaching one of my now numerous sources on the Belgrano, who has proved careful, accurate and serious, I learnt that Miss Murrell's nephew, Rob Green, mentioned in the article by name, had indeed occupied a key position in naval intelligence during the Falklands campaign. I was informed that Commander Green was in a position to know about the receipt and despatch of signals to and from HMS Conqueror, and intercepted signals from the Belgrano to the Argentine mainland and back, from both British and American sources.

However, at the outset I say candidly to the Minister that Rob Green has not approached me, that through an intermediary I have let him know that, if he wanted to talk to me, he would be welcome, and that to the best of my rather extensive knowledge, he has behaved absolutely properly as a naval officer loyal to the Navy in not talking about information gleaned when in the Navy.

The following questions flow from Judith Cook's article of 9 November and from other discussions that I have had.

Why did the police tell the press that Hilda Murrell's house had been ransacked when it later became clear that it had not been ransacked?

Whoever had been in the house had clearly been looking for something in a methodical manner. Some drawers and cupboards were open but not dissaranged.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

In an odd way, it is like the Belgrano affair—small inconsistencies seem to be part of larger inconsistencies and small lies part of larger lies.

Miss Murrell's house had been carefully searched and her papers gone through, but in an orderly manner. Her telephone had been cut off in such a way that, although it was dead from inside the house, anyone calling would seem to hear it ringing out. The police agree that that is a sophisticated way of doing things — not exactly the actions of a common burglar looking for loose money and taking a chance. Moreover, not only had the telephone at Miss Murrell's home at Ravenscroft, Shrewsbury, been tampered with — the phone at her cottage over the border in Wales had been disconnected.

Later the police said that the 78-year-old lady had been sexually assaulted. Why did they say thay when it turned out on their own evidence to be untrue? What is the purpose of that kind of inaccuracy other than to sweep uncomfortable suspicions under the carpet?

The farmer who discovered Miss Murrell's car slewed on to a verge reported it to the police and I understand that the local policeman reported it to the Shrewsbury police. Two days later the self-same car was still there. The farmer again reported it to the policeman, who reported it to the Shrewsbury police.

What did the Shrewsbury police do about the second report? If they were short-staffed because too many were away dealing with miners' picket lines, the House ought to be told. I understand that, even on Friday 23 March, the Shrewsbury police failed to follow up the report. They then said that the wrong registration number had been fed into the Swansea computer. Is that true?

Does a police force which, I am told, has a good reputation for efficiency normally act like that or was it told on high authority to act in such an uncharacteristically incompetent and slapdash way? Why did the police behave out of character? Ministers should tell us. I am told by more than one of the people interviewed by the police that they instinctively felt that the police officers knew jolly well that their time was being wasted and that they were having to go through the motions of a large-scale investigation for cosmetic reasons.

On Saturday 24 March, having at last identified the car as Miss Murrell's, police began to search the field and the copse near the car with a gamekeeper's wife. It was this lady who found Miss Murrell's body, noting that the time put down for its discovery was correctly 10.30 am. Yet I understand that the police told Rob Green, Miss Murrell's nephew, that his aunt's body was found much later and that they then changed their story and said that it was found at 7 am. Did the police give those two stories and, if so, why? Members of Miss Murrell's family see a series of police errors and the contradictory information that the police had given them was not cleared up at the inquest on 5 December.

The West Mercia police say that they forced an entry into Miss Murrell's house at 6 am on Saturday 24 March. Yet several credible witnesses say that they saw men in police uniform at the house on Friday night. How could that be? Were two police forces involved? At what time were the West Mercia police joined, if at all, by the Suffolk police responsible for Sizewell security? More particularly, why was the special branch involved at that stage? Why was it necessary to force an entry into Miss Murrell's house or to claim to have done so when I am told that the back door was unlocked? The curtains had been drawn and the light left on since the Wednesday of Miss Murrell's death.

I am told that members of the public who have come forward with different bits of information have been made to feel excessively foolish. Equally, I am told that this is quite uncharacteristic of the West Mercia police, who are usually models of courtesy, welcoming information from the public. Why should the police act out of character? Is it because not one but two sets of police were involved, neither of which appeared to know what the other was doing?

I can easily understand the work of the local police under Chief Detective Superintendent David Cole, brought in from Worcester, whose manners appear to have been exemplary and whose kindness and good sense were a credit to the police of this country. However the local police have, I gather, now agreed that the special branch was involved, and I understand that my praise for the local police does not in all cases apply to the special branch.

Will the Minister explain what special branch was doing so early in the case of the murder of a 78-year-old ex-rose-grower, if it really was a simple burglary?

Why have the family not been given a copy of the post-mortem report? A man who was capable, two years before, of organising crucial aspects of the British battle fleet in the south Atlantic, and who earned a special citation from the Commander-in-Chief of the fleet, is capable of reading a post-mortem report.

Rob Green says:

"They had said that they would answer questions about it, but you can imagine our difficulties as, since we had no idea what was on it, we did not know what to ask."

When he identified the body, Commander Green saw a mark of a blow under Miss Murrell's eye. There also appear to have been stab wounds, but insufficient to kill her. Did she, as the police say, die of hypothermia? Or was she killed by a person or persons? What does the Minister now say?

Why was a second autopsy carried out, and her family refused this too? Why was the body returned in a zinc-lined coffin in August? I can understand the police advice not to look inside, by that time, but why had so much time passed? Naturally, the body was then cremated.

Why was the Gower autopsy not published? The coroner, Colonel Crawford Clarke, has said that a second autopsy had to be held because the body was deteriorating, and that there had to be a second autopsy in case an assailant was charged. However, a body can be kept on ice.

The late Helen Smith, flown back from sweltering Jeddah, was kept for much longer. Is it normal practice to keep a body, and suddenly demand an autopsy at short notice in case an unnamed assailant is charged?

When it came, I am told that the cremation was carried out in a heck of an indecent hurry. What is the explanation? Is it not the case that the proper forensic procedures seem to have been blocked? Why? And why were the family not told that they could have an independent autopsy? Suspicions can only be laid to rest by answers.

The owner of the land on which the body was found, Mr. Scott, has stated emphatically both to the police and to the family of Miss Murrell that he was walking in the copse on the Thursday afternoon after the murder. He had

been carefully examining his property, as it was used as a game reserve. As a countryman, he said that he would have noticed the body of a rabbit, let alone a person. Did Mr. Scott lie? People who know him doubt it very much. He has no motive, and his neighbours say that he is not that kind of man. If he is correct, Miss Murrell's body must have been moved after her death. Why cannot the family and others have the accurate details of the autopsy, to let them know? I am told that a local poacher has now come forward to corroborate Mr. Scott's statement that there was no body in that copse on the Thursday afternoon.

There is also the evidence of my friend, Mr. Gerard Morgan Grenville, whom I have known for nearly 40 years. Mrs. Morgan Grenville tells me how Hilda Murrell rang them up in a great state at the end of February, and how she fetched her husband. Mr. Morgan Grenville, with whom I have had a good deal to do and who is a deeply serious man, says that her parting words on the telephone were:

"If they don't get me first, I want the world to know that one old woman has seen through their lies".

One is reminded of Scudder, the diarist in John Buchan's "The Thirty-Nine Steps'. Mr. Morgan Grenville had never heard Miss Murrell speak in that way before. Why should an old lady be prompted to say that? There has been speculation that her death was connected with a paper that she had written on the problems of nuclear waste and reactor choice, which she hoped would be read at the Sizewell B inquiry. Arthur Osman, writing in *The Observer* on 2 December, began his article:

"Silkwood parallels in English woman's death . . .

Was anti-nuclear power campaigner Hilda Murrell murdered because she was becoming too much of a nuisance to the industry?"

Since, more than 22 years ago, as a new Member of Parliament who was technologically minded and on the Public Accounts Committee, I was befriended by the late Sir Christopher Hinton, who later became Lord Hinton of Bankside OM—he was a great man and a great engineer and chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board —I have had dealings with many in the top echelons of the CEGB and and the Scottish generating boards. I cannot believe for one mini-second that Sir Walter Marshall, any of his colleagues, my friend Con Allday and others from the nuclear industry, would dream of authorising minions to search the house of a 78-year-old rose grower who had elegantly expressed, but unoriginal, views on reactor choice and nuclear waste disposal.

Besides, I have been to the great Peter Pears Benjamin Britten hall where the Sizewell inquiry is being held. I listened to evidence on day 178 and talked afterwards to Sir Frank Layfield. Those people will not fuss about Hilda Murrell and her evidence, for heaven's sake.

However, Commander Green says publicly:

"I am led to one solution only—that the break-in was to look for information, rather than valuables."

He said:

"I have a series of questions I want to ask about the police handling of the case, particularly their view of the proposition that the intruder—because he has no authority to kill her—had no alternative but to abduct her. Later that night he may have returned, put on the lights and drew curtains to make it look like an attempted burglary. He also left evidence to suggest a sex angle."

The inquest raised more real questions than it answered.

All of these inconsistencies point away from a random murder, and therefore away from the official explanation.

This background leads me to give credence to another version of events which has come my way as a receptacle of information about the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Belgrano.

First, I must candidly tell the Minister that in my previous 22 years in the House, I should have gone privately to the Home Secretary, regardless of party. I should have gone to "Rab" Butler, Henry Brooke, Frank Soskice, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins), my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), Reggie Maudling, Robert Carr, my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) or Willie Whitelaw. I have known them all and had dealings with them all. However, to some Ministers in the present Government, to whom I have been the subject of ridicule and deception, I am not prepared to go. I say in the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that least of all am I prepared to go to the present Home Secretary, who makes the types of speech about the miners that bring disgrace to the great office that he holds. I am not simply prepared to go to the present Home Secretary.

The story that I am told is as follows. In the early spring, the Prime Minister and Ministers close to her were getting very nervy about incessant questioning on the Belgrano in general and about signals, intercepted signals, and GCHQ at Cheltenham, which would call into question their truthfulness to the House, in particular. This was pre-Ponting. There were a number of suspicions about people dating from 19 and 20 December 1983, when I tabled questions to the Prime Minister about GCHQ Cheltenham, which are recorded in the Order Paper and *Hansard*.

Because Commander Robert Green was known to be unhappy about certain aspects of the Falklands war and was known to have wanted to leave the Navy, he came under a cloud of suspicion, wrongly, to the best of my knowledge, but certainly under a cloud of suspicion. It was thought that he might have copies of documents and raw signals that incriminated the Prime Minister, some of the originals of which had been destroyed on instructions from a very high level by the intelligence services.

Just as those of us who have had certain documents have taken the precaution of keeping them in friends' or relatives' houses while we have them, so it was thought that some of Rob Green's supposed records might be in the home of the aunt to whom he was close.

I suppose—I say this in the presence of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who I hope will have the opportunity of contributing to the debate—that one cannot complain that the suspicion fell on Rob Green, as he was one of the officers at the very heart of the Falklands operation. He was one of the very few to have left the service, although I understand that he had decided to go before the Falklands crisis blew up.

I am also given to understand—and I am happy to accept it—that there was no premeditated intention of doing away with Miss Murrell—only a search of her house when she was out. Alas, on Wednesday 21 March she returned unexpectedly to change. The intruders either arrived while she was dressing or were disturbed by her. Being a lady of courage and spunk, often found in that generation of women, Miss Murrell fought them. They too had to fight. They injured her and panicked.

I am informed that the intruders were not after money or nuclear information but were checking the house to see

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

if there were any Belgrano-related documents of Commander Green in the home of his aunt. Things went disastrously wrong. They had no intention of injuring, let alone killing, a 78-year-old ex-rose grower. Yet, being the lady she was and in her home, Hilda Murrell fought and was severely injured. She was then killed or left to die from hypothermia, and the cover-up had to begin, because I am informed that the searchers were men of the British intelligence.

If Ministers cannot solemnly deny my belief about the participation of intelligence, on whose ministerial authority, if any, did the search of Miss Murrell's home take place? Was there clearance, or was this the intelligence services "doing their own thing"? Did they do it on political orders, and if so, on whose orders? Some of us have had increasing misgivings about the role of the intelligence services in this country—again I say this in the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover —in connection with the miners' strike.

It is high time that there was a Select Committee of Privy Councillors to keep an eye on our intelligence services. Such a Select Committee would be a more appropriate forum than a Consolidated Fund debate, but until that happens, and given my opinion of present senior Ministers—un-British in their behaviour compared with Ministers of previous Governments — I have no alternative but to ask these questions under the cloak of parliamentary privilege, none of the situations for which the privileges of the House of Commons exist.

I ought to add that Commander Rob Green was, I am told, the person who physically sent the signal to Conqueror that sank the Belgrano. I understand from his friends that he was also responsible for passing signals from Endurance which had shown beyond any reasonable doubt that an invasion of the Falklands was likely to happen.

Rob Green considered the Falklands to be an unnecessary war, and the Belgrano sinking appalled him —albeit he judged it to be an unfortunate necessity—as it did some other senior officers of the senior service. He took early retirement after 20 years in the Navy and left. From this Prime Minister and her colleagues he would come under suspicion. It is from the head of our security services that Parliament should be demanding an explanation, because of one thing I am certain—that there are persons in Westminster and Whitehall who know a great deal more about the violent death of Miss Hilda Murrell than they have so far been prepared to divulge.

4.15 am

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): All hon. Members will have listened with a great deal of concern and a degree of admiration to the speech of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). He is well known in the House and performs a great service by introducing deeply and carefully researched questions of this kind. He brings them forward with a great deal of courage and conviction.

Commander Bob Green is a member of the Liberal association in my constituency. I have known him for some time. The details brought forward in the speech of the hon. Member for Linlithgow were totally unknown to me until last night he did me the courtesy of allowing me to read his speech. One does not necessarily have to agree with the conclusions that the hon. Member has reached to recognise fully the serious nature of the questions he has rightly put and which need to be answered.

First let me deal with some of the facts. I have not carried out detailed research into the facts put forward by the hon. Member. However, I have the highest respect for Commander Bob Green. I asked the hon. Member if I could ring Commander Green and read his speech to him. The hon. Member allowed me to do so. Therefore, I rang Commander Green and read to him the speech of the hon. Member. I have his authority to say that he confirms and corroborates all that the hon. Member has said. The details and facts are precisely as Commander Green sees them. Where the hon. Member has referred to Commander Green, Commander Green assures me that he agrees with the hon. Member's references.

It is also fair and proper to make the point that Commander Green has in no way collaborated with the hon. Member for Linlithgow in drawing up his speech. What the hon. Member has done is entirely on his own behalf. Commander Green has had no contact whatsoever with the hon. Member. Therefore, the comments that the hon. Member was kind enough to make about the part played by Commander Green are entirely substantiated. The facts that the hon. Member has given and the conclusions he has drawn accord precisely with those of Commander Green. In no way can it be said that the hon. Member for Linlithgow has taken the name of Commander Green in vain.

I turn from the facts of the matter to the conclusions that the hon. Member has reached. They are the hon. Member's own conclusions. However, I fully understand, as will those who tomorrow read this text with some interest, how the conclusions the hon. Member has drawn are capable of being supported by the questions that he has asked. In that sense, his conclusions and questions are far too serious to be dismissed lightly. I have observed on many occasions in the past, even when the hon. Member for Linlithgow has asked questions with which I do not agree, that from time to time the Government have used, as the hon. Member mentioned in his speech, a degree of ridicule in order to dismiss them. That would be wholly inappropriate on this occasion and I am certain that the Minister will not attempt to do so. These are very important questions of fact and detail. I very much hope that the Minister will answer them. If he is unable to answer all of these questions now, no doubt he will give answers in detail my means of letter.

In the absence of detailed answers to the detailed questions which the hon. Member for Linlithgow has put, I believe that there is only one way forward: a full inquiry in front of a High Court judge. I hope that other hon. Members will support that kind of inquiry. We do not call at this stage for such an inquiry. We merely say that if the Minister is unable or unwilling to answer questions of fact in detail, that is the only proper way forward.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that the conclusions drawn by the hon. Member for Linlithgow are deep and serious. Most of the evidence suggests that they are possibilities. I hope that the Minister will be able to dismiss them unequivocally. The hon. Member used the word "solemn". It is an unhappy fact that a number of the Government's actions, including those following the Belgrano incident, have done much to raise suspicions among those of us who would like to support the Government in the difficult decisions that they had to take

in time of war. The hon. Gentleman and I may part company over the Belgrano issue, because Governments often have to take extremely difficult decisions in time of war and they are entitled to the support of the democratic process, expressed through the House — even if the decisions prove in the cold light of day to have been wrong. The one case in which the Government would not be entitled to the support of the House and the country would be if they had acted with the specific intention of saving or assisting their political operations afterwards. We would almost have to get inside the minds of Ministers to discover whether that had happened.

However, the Government's campaign of misinformation on occasions and inadequate answers to questions has kept the Belgrano issue alive and caused suspicion and concern among those of us who would like to be able to support them. We would not like to have such suspicions of any British Government. I hope that the Minister will deal unequivocally with the conclusions drawn by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, so that the matter is not allowed to rumble on. The Minister has a duty to do that.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow touched on the broader issue of the intelligence services. My party and I have always pressed the need for a Select Committee of Privy Councillors to deal with intelligence matters. The intelligence services are not sufficiently accountable to the House. The mechanism for such accountability needs to be chosen carefully. For reasons that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, my party has always believed that there should be a Select Committee of Privy Councillors. It would have been much better if the hon. Member for Linlithgow had been able to take his case to such a Committee in private, rather than being forced to raise the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: With the first so-called Ponting information, I went to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. I would have preferred to go to a Select Committee of Privy Councillors or a Select Committee dealing specifically with intelligence. It has never been any part of my case to criticise service men or to denigrate the services. No criticism of anyone involved in the task force has ever escaped my lips; the only exception is Lord Lewin, but I criticised him in his capacity as a member of the War Cabinet and not as an admiral.

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to the hon. Member for making that clear, because he is significantly misunderstood on that matter. I support him. Many former service colleagues of mine who were involved in the incident at various levels believe that the hon. Gentleman is doing a considerable service.

It would have been more appropriate if the hon. Gentleman's case had been dealt with by a Select Committee of Privy Councillors instead of on the Floor of the House. Such a Select Committee would be the best mechanism for ensuring the accountability of the intelligence services to the democratic process.

I come to another central issue. It is important and necessary to have that accountability because, if the intelligence services are to operate at all effectively or properly, they must operate under appropriate political control. Indeed, I would go further and say that the intelligence services can do their job effectively only if they are closely connected with the whole political system, are very much under political control and are able to influence the political system in an appropriate and proper fashion.

At the very heart of this issue lies the system that we now refer to as "clearance". The intelligence services have to receive clearances at various appropriate levels, including at the very highest level—that of the Prime Minister—before taking any action. I have no doubt that action such as that mentioned by the hon. Member for Linlithgow would, under normal circumstances, have had to be approved at the very highest level.

If what the hon. Member says is true, it is inconceivable that it could have occurred in normal circumstances other than with agreement at the very highest level. But if that did not happen, there must have been a significant breakdown in the way that our intelligence services are controlled. One must reach one or other of those conclusions if the hon. Gentleman's thesis is supportable. Either a politician at a very high level was involved in taking the decision to allow such action to go ahead, or there must have been a very serious breakdown in the democratic and political accountability and control of our intelligence services.

Those are the only two conclusions. Naturally, we shall have to wait and see whether the hon. Gentleman's overall theory is supportable, but, if it is, those conclusions inevitably follow. There are many people, including me, who, because of friends and contacts, have reason to worry that the traditional and appropriate control of this country's intelligence services has become much looser than appropriate and much less regulated than is necessary within a democracy.

Whatever the case with regard to the intelligence services and the conclusions drawn by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, the facts that he has presented are very serious and important. I hope that the Minister will now be able to answer our very serious concerns, and that he will make an unequivocal statement about the overall conclusion that has been reached.

Finally, I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow for raising this important subject and for giving us the opportunity to hold this extremely serious debate.

4.27 am

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The House owes my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) a debt not only for raising this issue, but for the way in which he has pursued the Belgrano affair by — as the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) implied — directing himself not at the service men involved but at the operation that controlled the naval movements at the time.

My hon. Friend has given us the sort of story that would tax the ingenuity of a novelist. However, it is precisely at such times that we should remember that truth can be stranger than fiction. I hope that the Minister will not attempt to dismiss it as some form of creative literature or to put it down to a colourful imagination. My hon. Friend has put very real questions to the Minister and they deserve answers.

Like my hon. Friend, I realise that those questions cannot be answered easily or quickly. No one, perhaps, expects the Minister to give full and detailed answers now. But we, and others outside the House, expect him to put before the country in due course a satisfactory explanation of events, or to set up an inquiry to ensure that events are looked into in more depth. We may then be reassured that

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the implications developed by the hon. Member for Yeovil have no foundation. Obviously, we should prefer a more conventional explanation, but we cannot assume that there is one until those questions have been answered.

It is important to remember that my hon. Friend has pursued this matter and the related matter of the Belgrano in a way that has not only respected the integrity of those involved in the military operation, but revealed the extraordinary accuracy of his research. He has, literally on a one-man operation, been able to demonstrate that the Government's arguments have not held together over a period of time. They have had to change their story from time to time, and it must be to my hon. Friend's credit that his research has brought that to light.

Not only is my hon. Friend's research accurate, but so are the sources of his information. I know those to be extremely good sources of information. The Minister and many others must be deeply disturbed by the quality of the information that is always available to my hon. Friend. He uses that information to deploy his case well.

I hope that if the Minister cannot give us answers today, he will be able to reassure the House that he will ensure that those answers are provided at some stage and in some context.

There is the wider issue of the control of the security forces. It has long been the view of the Labour party, and certainly of myself, that the security forces should be under much greater political control, answerable to the House in a more direct and effective manner than they have been in the past. Anyone who has been connected with Northern Ireland will know the importance of that. The security forces have grown in number and sophistication in recent years, and to rely on the control of either the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister, answerable to the House, must be grossly inadequate in any democracy.

A suggestion has been put forward for a Committee of Privy Councillors. I always want to question whether a committee need necessarily be composed of Privy Councillors. There are other ways of dealing with the matter. We shall never give hon. Members sufficient weight and authority unless we are prepared to recognise that each can act responsibly and properly on such a Committee.

I am prepared to move on the nature and type of democratic control of the security forces. We cannot go on much longer with the present system of control. It brings the country into disrepute and leaves unanswered questions such as those asked by my hon. Friend. It must be fundamentally dangerous for any democracy to be left with the feeling that adequate answers are not forthcoming. If the public feel that there are cover-ups, that people are trying to avoid difficult questions and that the structure of the democracy is not good enough to bring matters out, the credibility of that democracy will be undermined. Sooner or later that must change. My hon. Friend, by the way in which he has brought the matter out, has done a service not only to the House but to the nation as well.

4.33 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): The House has listened, as I suspect it always does listen, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) with great interest. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was kind enough to say that he had no information about what the hon. Gentleman would bring before the House until a few hours before the debate commenced. The hon. Gentleman will be of the clear opinion that I had no information about what was in the hon. Gentleman's request to raise this issue on the Consolidated Fund until the moment of his utterances.

Therefore, the hon. Gentleman, whom I am pleased to say I have known for some 30 years, will recognise that any response that I give him will lack not only the measure of courtesy that I would wish to extend to him in being able to provide him with answers to the questions that he has posed, but also, inevitably, the factual background against which any ministerial answer should be given.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I cannot answer the many questions that he raised. The inferences he drew went substantially further than the topic set down for debate. We are here to discuss the police investigation into a death that occurred in tragic circumstances. Both the hon. Members for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and for Yeovil sought, reasonably, to argue the case for a different form of control over the security services in relation to the incident at the centre of the debate.

I make my second point as an observation, the reason for which may become more evident. We are considering a fairly substantial police investigation into the alleged murder of an old lady. Thousands of people have been involved, and the inquiry is continuing. Regrettably, it has not been concluded. If a police inquiry is continuing and its scale has reached these proportions, it may be considered odd, if there were a British security element involved in the investigation, or occasioning the crime for which the investigation has been set up, that it should continue without those involved being able to ensure that the police and the security services are sharing common knowledge. That is merely an observation. It requires a great deal of weight to be attached to it. Considering the time that I have had to listen to the important revelations of the hon. Member for Linlithgow, I am bound to make that observation.

My task is to deal with the police investigation. I appreciate the words the hon. Gentleman uttered regarding the reputation of the West Mercia force, and his comments, many of which were complimentary, in describing the case. I trust that no police force would wish to tackle such a tragic incident without the fullest degree of care, skill and energy. If there is any doubt about that, I shall express great anxiety, but I believe that the force has tackled it in that way.

The House will wish me to put on record the details of the incident as conveyed to me by the chief constable of West Mercia because that is where the problem currently lies. Had we been able to book an individual or individuals, it may have provided many of the answers to the hon. Gentleman's questions. I say "may" because his questions were numerous and far-reaching. A concluded investigation which results in charges being preferred and a trial being held may be the natural order of events for an investigation into a death associated with violence, and the correct way in which the factual background of the incident and the motive should be deployed for public view. Any other way would be less than conclusive.

The hon. Gentleman expressed an interest previously in a written question about the case of Miss Murrell. It is

right that I should respond on the basis of information that we have obtained from the chief constable. In doing so, I must draw attention—as I believe I have—to the fact that the story is incomplete. There are some facts which it would be inappropriate for me to disclose. If I did no, it might hinder the police inquiries that are continuing and might prejudice their questioning of any suspect who might be apprehended.

Miss Murrell, who was 79-years-old at the time of her death, according to our information, lived alone in her house——

Mr. Ashdown: There seems to be some confusion about Miss Murrell's age. Her nephew, Commander Green, assures me that she was 78 at the time of her death. It is a small point, but one which I should mention to the Minister.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has impeccable authority for that, for correcting me. Let the record state that she was 78. She lived alone in her house at Sutton road, Shrewsbury, and she also had a cottage in Wales. She was known to be a member of several clubs and associations connected with conservation and the environment, and she had a substantial reputation as a rose grower. She was also involved, but certainly not solely concerned with, groups connected with nuclear disarmament. The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to her interest in nuclear waste and to the paper that she had prepared. Some press reports after the inquest into her death noted primarily her interest in rose growing as the most important feature in her life.

Miss Murrell's body was found in a coppice at 10.25 am on Saturday 24 March 1984 by a police constable, accompanied by the wife of the local gamekeeper. In subsequent police circulations about the offence, the time of 10.40 am was used, which was the time at which other officers summoned to the scene arrived. The police surgeon attended the site and certified death at midday. The senior investigating officer, a detective chief superintendent, arrived at 1.30 pm, followed shortly afterwards by a Home Office pathologist, who further examined Miss Murrell's body, which was then taken to the Royal Shrewsbury hospital.

The likely sequence of events—the hon. Gentleman will understand that I must say the "likely" sequence—preceding the discovery of Miss Murrell's body has been pieced together by the police on the basis of information from many witnesses who came forward to assist them. On the morning of Wednesday 21 March 1984, Miss Murrell went to local shops in Shrewsbury, about a mile from her home. She travelled there in her white Renault car, and was seen shopping there between 11 am and midday. It is also known that she visited her local bank, where she cashed a cheque. Her return home at approximately midday was confirmed by two witnesses, one of whom had a brief conversation with her.

Subsequent police examination of Miss Murrell's home found no evidence of forcible entry, but that access could have been gained by an intruder through an insecure door. On her return from the shops, Miss Murrell had apparently had time to change from her outdoor clothing and to put away some of her shopping. There is then evidence that, in an upstairs room, a struggle took place with the offender, who had apparently previously made a systematic search of the premises, drawn the front downstairs curtains and left on the electric light.

Miss Murrell was then taken by the intruder in her car and driven approximately six miles to the scene of her death. Numerous witnesses have been able to provide details of the route of the journey, during which Miss Murrell sat in the passenger seat. The journey ended with the car being parked on the side of the road near the coppice, in the position in which it was subsequently found when the police were called to it. It seemed that the car had collided with both sides of the banked verges of the road, and then been driven into a ditch, from which an unsuccessful attempt had been made to remove it. Miss Murrell was then taken to the coppice by her abductor, beaten and stabbed, and possibly, as the coroner subsequently concluded, left to die of hypothermia.

Although, on the day after it was left there a local witness passed near to where Miss Murrell's body was subsequently found, he saw nothing, but the police are satisfied that the lie of the land may have hidden it from his sight. A local farmer first reported to the police, on the afternoon of 12 March that Miss Murrell's car was in the ditch in the position it had obviously been left by her assailant. The officers who arrived to investigate within an hour made only a preliminary search of the immediate area and, because there were no apparent suspicious circumstances, only superficial damage to the car and no apparent danger or obstruction to the public from the car, took no further action there. The car registration number was checked on the national computer and its ownership established. A police constable visited Miss Murrell's home early in the evening on Friday 23 March but, although he saw signs of habitation and the back door unlocked, he did not search the house as he assumed that nothing was amiss, despite being unable to make contact with anybody there. However, following a further telephone call to the police on the afternoon of 23 March to report that Miss Murrell's car was still in the ditch, officers went to her home later that evening, discovered that she was missing and a search was instituted the following morning with the results that I have already described.

Clearly, the police made detailed searches of both Miss Murrell's home and of the coppice to discover any information that might be of use in their inquiry. Reports of a grey-suited man having been seen running away from the coppice area at the relevant time of 21 March were also investigated and a reconstruction was staged. Despite 48 witnesses having been traced and further public appeals, the police have not yet been able to identify the man. The police also made extensive enquiries to trace people who might have been in Sutton road, where Miss Murrell lived, in the days preceding and the day of her murder. Over 100 people were identified as having been in the area, 50 of them on the day of the murder. Tracing these people formed a major part of the police inquiry and the process of elimination has resulted in only three of them remaining untraced at present.

From the considerable information that has been made available to me by the police it has become quite clear that the West Mercia police have devoted substantial resources to the investigation of what they see as a very grave offence. We all share their concern—that undoubtedly goes for the hon. Member for Linlithgow—that the offender is still at large.

I shall give some of the figures about the extent of the police inquiry. Some 3,500 people have been suggested as the potential offender by the public, police officers or by

[Mr. Shaw]

research on local and national intelligence indexes. Out of this number, 962 people have been identified for interview, and over half of them have already been interviewed. Over 1,300 telephone messages had been received by 30 November, over 2,000 statements taken and over 55,000 items of information recorded, both manually and on computer in the incident room.

As at 30 November again, nearly 12,000 people had been interviewed, over 4,500 houses visited and over 1,500 vehicles checked. I make these points not just because I think that this is an example of the tenacity and thoroughness with which the West Mercia constabulary are investigating this matter, but because even if some believe the inferences drawn by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, there has still been a massive orthodox investigation into the tragic events surrounding Miss Murrell's death.

In the initial stages of their investigation, the police made full inquiries into suggestions that Miss Murrell had been murdered because of her connections with various anti-nuclear organisations, in particular that she was at the time of her death preparing a paper to oppose the Sizewell B project. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Linlithgow for dismissing that suggestion out of hand, with the probity that we know him to possess. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. A senior investigating officer assigned a small team specifically to inquire into those aspects, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be glad to note that no evidence has been found to link those activities with her death.

The police have also sought the assistance of other forces both here and overseas in analysing the considerable data available to them to prepare a profile of a likely offender by the best techniques possible. This profile closely mirrors the picture of the offender formed by the West Mercia police. Extracts of the profile have been publicised on television and in the press, and they clearly have resulted in some of the substantial public responses to which I have referred. The police investigation continues.

The inquest into Miss Murrell's death was held at Shrewsbury magistrates' court on 5 December, where both Miss Murrell's family and the police were represented by solicitors. The evidence presented to the coroner by the police was that which I have described; and on the basis of this and evidence given by the Home Office pathologist, the coroner recorded a verdict that Miss Murrell died probably on 21 March 1984 as a result of hypothermia, the victim also suffering from wounds to the abdomen and bruises to the face. The family has expressed to the police its thanks for a thorough investigation into a particularly difficult case—a case that is far from closed.

The hon. Members for Linlithgow and for Yeovil, and the hon. Member for Hammersmith in his brief intervention, said that behind these circumstances there could lurk matters of grave import. As I said at the outset, the comments made and the questions asked by the hon. Gentlemen deserve and will obtain a proper and considered response. The questions asked go beyond the remit of the Home Office, and the hon. Member for Linlithgow will recognise that time will be involved in obtaining the answers. The hon. Gentlemen have raised matters of import, and I therefore give the undertaking——

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister for the seriousness of his reply. As long as there is a considered reply—whatever that reply may be—there will be no pressure from me to hurry the response. I certainly will not urge the Home Office to get on with the job and give a speedy reply. It can be a reply that takes weeks to obtain.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that interjection, which is both helpful and courteous. I take note that the hon. Gentleman has expressed substantial criticism of the reputation of the Home Office. I regret that fact, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that the debate and the questions will obtain full consideration and a proper and comprehensive reply in the manner wished by the hon. Gentleman, myself and, no doubt, the House.

BBC (Financing)

4.53 am

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Shortly before 5 o'clock in the morning is perhaps not the happiest time to consider such an important subject. Interest in this subject goes far beyond that of those hon. Members who are able to join in this discussion.

For many years I have been associated with the BBC in both television and radio. I have contributed to and conducted research for a number of current affairs programmes for BBC radio and television. I formed the impression from inside and outside the BBC that many dedicated people work for the corporation, often in appalling conditions. Some parts of the BBC are of great quality. I single out Radio 3 and Radio 4 and parts of BBC 1. There is also unbelievable waste and inefficiency which are characteristics of many public sector institutions.

There is no doubt that this subject is of great interest. It evokes a considerable response from the public, as I am sure hon. Members will have found from their postbags over the past few weeks and will find in the weeks to come. It also encourages visits by constituents to Members' surgeries.

A number of opinion polls have been published. They show that there is considerable hostility to the BBC's proposal for a 41 per cent. increase in the licence fee. That increase is apparently supported by 13 per cent. only of the sample interviewed by NOP on behalf of D'Arcy-Macmanus and Masius, and by 14 per cent. only of the sample interviewed by MORI on behalf of *The Sunday Times*. An increase from £46 to £65 is a whopping increase for anyone who is living on a restricted budget due to a fixed income.

I am interested also in the morality of the matter. With the development of cable television, the BBC will have a declining minority of listeners and viewers. There are bound to be questions about the legitimacy of the base for a compulsory tax, such as the BBC licence fee.

Many commentators and hon. Members on both sides of the House have drawn attention to the regressive nature of the BBC licence as a form of taxation. That is hardly surprising. Television sets are possessed by many pensioners, single parent families and others who find it difficult to find the resources to pay a large licence fee, even with the various methods of payment that have been introduced in recent years. Rich people, who have more than one television set, pay the same licence fee as others with one. To that extent, this tax falls harshly upon those groups in our society which can least afford it.

The BBC's problem is that revenues are no longer buoyant. They were buoyant primarily because the number of television sets was increasing. The increase is now declining. The number of people owning colour television pushed up the revenues because of the difference between the cost of a black and white and a colour licence.

Colour television licences exceed 80 per cent. of the total number of licences. The number of colour television licences is not expected to increase at anything like the rate of recent years. That is hardly surprising. The estimates at the moment are for an increase of 3 per cent. per year.

Futhermore, the BBC, in its admirably documented submission in support of its proposal, has drawn attention to the spiralling cost of providing television services. I am not happy to accept that it is necessary that all the costs should spiral in the way that they do. That is a matter to which I shall return.

I want to discuss whether we need to increase the licence fee at all. The commonest solution to be put forward by commentators over the past few weeks is the introduction of some advertising. Whether it should be partial for Radio 1 and Radio 2, or perhaps for BBC 1, or across the entire range of BBC services, is a matter that will no doubt arouse great debate. I find the BBC's attitude to this proposition puzzling. It claims to be non-commercial and it deprecates advertising. Indeed, that has been repeated recently by the new chairman of the BBC. He has said that he does not consider advertising to be appropriate. Yet there has been a grudging acceptance of the value of sponsorship, or at any rate the necessity of sponsorship for sport and some areas of the arts. In appropriate programmes, the BBC will frequently interview authors about books which they have recently published. In a sense, that is a form of advertising of the product.

There are also the BBC's own plugs. It is scarcely possible to listen to the radio or watch television without hearing various forms of plugs almost as frequently as on the independent channels. The BBC plugs only its own programmes or its own products, of which there is quite a wide range. Martin Anderson, an economist, has written:

> "BBC Enterprises has branches dealing with TV Programme Sales, Film and Videotape Library Sales, Education and Training Sales and Hire, Video Exhibitions, Merchandising, Records and Tapes, Music Publishing, Technical Facilities, as well as Production, Technical and Service Depts."

With such a long list of branches, it can hardly be said that the BBC is virginly pure of any commercial involvement.

What are the possibilities? The possibility that seems to meet with the broadest degree of support is the introduction of advertising to Radio 1 and Radio 2, which are comparable with commercial radio stations. They play light or pop music most of the time. The primary purpose of BBC 2 is to provide programmes of an educational nature. However, BBC 1 concentrates more on entertainment, so that is another area where advertising could be considered.

What has been the reaction of the public to the idea of advertising? I return to the NOP survey. Apparently 77 per cent. want the licence fee to be pegged, even if that means advertising. According to MORI, the figure is 69 per cent. I would not draw too much of a conclusion from the difference between the two percentages. According to NOP, 56 per cent. think that the programmes would not suffer as a result. That must be set against the 42 per cent. who think that the programmes are not any good anyway.

What do the ITV companies think? We have not heard from them all, but we have heard from Granada through a number of different letters to *The Guardian*. It seems that it thinks it a bad idea. That is hardly surprising. After all, it would have to compete for the same advertisng revenue and, therefore, it would see the idea as a threat. It would mean that it, too, would have to tackle some of the restrictive practices that riddle the media — both televison and Fleet street.

The BBC objects to the principle of advertising because it says that it would lead eventually to the rejigging of schedules and the sales department would dominate. It claims that the rating schedules would become the most

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important factor. So the BBC portrays itself as highminded. I find that rather unconvincing. It should be remembered that at the end of 1983, when the BBC's share of the market had fallen to 45 per cent., it rescheduled "The Thorn Birds" in place of "Panorama" and, curiously enough, its rating increased to 49 per cent. Therefore, the BBC is not above rejigging its ratings if it thinks that there is something in it for it.

One must address the question of advertising in principle. I personally believe that advertising has much merit. In order to increase advertising revenue, television and radio must meet audience demand, and surely that should be an objective of television and radio companies. Of course, that argument would not commend itself to the eletists, but it would commend itself to the general public.

It is also said that quality would suffer. That is a difficult argument to follow, because more revenue would come into television and could be devoted to greater quality as well as to a greater range of programmes. It is instructive to note that, even with the present system, the ITV companies are capable of making some extremely good quality programmes, and at the recent Emmy awards, Britain had a clean sweep in the section for non-United States competitors. All five of those prizes went to independent television companies.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): Almost as an aside and a throwaway line, the hon. Gentleman said that if there were to be advertising on BBC, more revenue would come into television. That is not the estimate of all the practitioners in advertising or of the television or radio companies. Where will that increased revenue come from? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the cake will be enlarged, or is he suggesting that the additional revenue coming to the BBC under these proposals will come from commercial local radio and perhaps local newspapers? If so, what is the consequence for the latter?

Mr. Jones: I shall return to that matter later. The simple answer is that I believe that the cake will grow, and that that view is shared by practitioners in advertising.

Public opinion is important. It is the public's money, and they should be the first to be considered. The MORI poll in March 1984 showed that 44 per cent. thought that the BBC presented either not very good value for money or poor value for money, so clearly that worried them. That might have concerned simply price, with the public feeling that if the television licence fee had been lower, the standard would have been acceptable. However, apparently that is not so, because 42 per cent. were dissatisfied with quality as opposed to 53 per cent. who were satisfied. The same question was asked about ITV programmes. In their case, only 31 per cent. were dissatisfied, whereas 64 per cent. were satisfied. That is a reflection of the increasing quality of ITV productions not just in news and current affairs, where they are incomparably good, but in documentaries, light entertainment, plays, and so on.

The idea of advertising must have its supporters as well as its opponents. I should like to mention them at length. It has been welcomed by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. Its media policy group welcomed the Saatchi and Saatchi Compton report calling for advertising. The group stated:

"It is our view that allowing advertising to fund the BBC increasingly will give the corporation the resources to develop its services more fully without the need for the public to bear the burden."

That is part of the reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk).

The idea also commended itself recently to Opposition members. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw, (Mr. Ashton) has shown a particular interest in it, and, much to my amazement, so has the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), although not so recently. Michael Tracey, writing in "Public Money", in September said:

"In 1966 the then Postmaster General, Tony Benn, as the Minister responsible for broadcasting, actually considered forcing the BBC to take advertising. Such an idea was easily defeated by BBC lobbying, appalled civil servants — one, legend has it, threatened to take the issue to the Queen if Benn did not desist".

Of course, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield may have changed his mind about this as much as he has about many other matters, but it is interesting to note that he favoured advertising at that time.

Many individual advertising agencies welcome the idea of increased opportunities. Rodney Harris, media director of D'Arcy MacManus and Masius, has said:

"Last year, advertisers were having to pay nearly twice as much in real terms for television airtime as they did in 1970".

That being so, it is scarcely surprising that advertisers should view this as a means of keeping down their costs as well as bringing extra revenue into the industry.

In any real world, the BBC itself should welcome the idea because the gap between BBC and ITV resources continues to widen and will clearly lead to a challenge in the quality of programmes in due course.

Advertising is only part of the answer. For a great part of the revenue necessary there is still the choice between greater efficiency and doing something about the scale of the operations. I believe that there is tremendous waste and major opportunities for cost cutting within the present service. Many who work at the BBC admit that. Stuart Young, the new chairman, in an interview published in *The Times* recently, conceded:

"I think that within the industry there are certain manning practices which have developed that are less than desirable. But what I do know for a fact is that any manning difficulties that there are within the BBC are nothing as compared to the manning difficulties in commercial television."

I do not suggest that just because ITV is overmanned that means that the BBC is not. It is a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

In an admirable letter in *The Times* of 27 November my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Hooson) detailed the matter as follows:

"If one cuts through the BBC's idealised view of itself, what actually exists is a badly managed, over-staffed and over-extended empire, as much in need of pruning as were British Steel, British Leyland and the NCB. When can viewers expect to see a BBC TV exposure of its inefficient work practices and of the large investment in computer technology lying idle in newsrooms because of lack of will to manage resources lest any interest group might be upset?"

I have had experience of that myself when working for the BBC. One notorious practice of the BBC is that, when it wants information which may not necessarily be urgent, instead of asking one to post it, a taxi is sent to collect it. That is a shocking waste of public resources. It is also well known that on outside locations many BBC staff enjoy a standard of food and hotel accommodation greatly exceeding that which should apply when public money is involved.

Many people who work in the BBC would probably concede that there is quite a lot of waste. I have heard it said by many who work further down the tree that the BBC is one of those organisations in which there are whole tribes of chiefs rather than Indians. Certainly my personal observation has been that the people at the sharp end often have to operate in extremely poor conditions and with limited equipment, while the top people have far more support staff than one would recognise as necessary.

There is also the question of scale. The BBC has gone into a number of new areas in recent years. Local radio, for example, is costing it about £20 million per year. That is about 3 per cent. of the total and it is increasing. I do not believe that the BBC needs to be in local radio at all. Its service duplicates that of the commercial stations. It is also often inferior in quality to the commercial stations which are famed for their extremely high technical standards.

It would be far better if the public had a choice, and if there were competition. The BBC should sell off its local radio services to the private sector. In that context, I pay tribute to the Chiltern radio station — an independent radio station serving my constituency—which is widely listened to. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) nods agreement. The station serves his area, too. It is of very fine quality. If there were two such stations in our area, with no drain on public money, that would be a great amenity for the people of our part of the Chilterns. The proposed BBC radio station will be a drain on the taxpayers' resources.

Breakfast television currently costs the BBC £5 million. I wonder why the project was allowed to go ahead in the first place, at a time when the BBC was complaining about the strain on its resources.

I do not believe that the present method of charging through the licensing structure can survive the present technological revolution. It is almost inconceivable that, with cable television around the corner and the duopoly of ITV and BBC dying, the general public will continue to be willing to pay for licences. I look forward to the day when people will pay for individual programmes through some sort of pay cable system.

The argument is about choice. We have a long way to go. People often sneer at television and radio in the United States—at the experience and the choice—but there is far more choice in the United States. In his book, "The Cable Revolution — Britain on the Brink of the Information Society", the editor of *The Sunday Times*, Mr. Andrew Neil, picks the schedules available in New York and London at 9 pm on 7 June 1982. In New York there was a choice of 25 programmes, compared with three in London—Channel 4 not yet being in operation. The New York programmes varied immensely. New York had a choice between "MASH", a documentary on black ghetto life, another film, a talk show, a documentary about the Kennedy years, baseball, a Spanish show, a variety show, Nureyev, Spanish drama, an opera—"Orpheus"—a public access discussion on international education, a seminar on nuclear arms, a film called "Bye, Bye, Birdie", a drama, another film, gymnastics, the Royal Ballet, folk art, Chinese cooking, the news and the film "The High Country". The citizens of New York clearly had a phenomenal choice. In Miami, too, there are no fewer than 80 stations in operation.

It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Knowsley, North should say that there would be a shortage of advertising. If Miami — a small town compared with London—can operate 80 such stations, is it not possible for the United Kingdom to operate more than two television stations with advertising? I do not believe that advertising would be in short supply. The amount may grow slowly. That is something that will have to be taken into account when the decision is made—and in March the Home Secretary will have to make a decision.

All these features will have to be included in the package if it is to win my acceptance. I expect that advertising will be introduced in due course. I expect evidence of improved efficiency in the BBC. I expect that the BBC will be encouraged to privatise local radio and breakfast television. Meanwhile, if there is to be an increase in the short term, it will take place without my vote in the House of Commons.

5.18 am

Mr. Francis Maude (Warwickshire, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on his introduction of this important subject. I congratulate him on the subject, if not on the timing of the debate. We are not playing to a packed House. My hon. Friend the Minister has had to sit through the previous debate as well, and I congratulate him on looking remarkably perky.

This is an important debate because of its timing in regard to the proposed increase in the BBC licence fee and because, since the beginning of broadcasting, there has been a liberal consensus that we have to maintain the purity and virginity of the public service broadcasting ethic. Any mention of advertising in connection with the BBC somehow signals the advance of the Visigoths across Europe. The fragile structure of civilisation totters and is close to crumbling at the very mention of the word.

The quality of the argument for advertising on the BBC has advanced enormously. The case has become ever more potent and it has been put lucidly and forcefully tonight by my hon. Friend. The argument against has remained static and has been poorly articulated. It does not seem to occur to those who defend the status quo that we require a fairly rigorous analysis of what is going on and of the justification for maintaining the status quo.

The intellectual arrogance of the argument in favour of the status quo reached its apogee in an editorial in *The Observer* last Sunday. It had that peculiarly irritating and patronising tone of superiority which is so redolent of the liberal consensus. It said:

"It is simply not the case that the sharing of advertising between ITV and BBC would leave the underlying geology of British broadcasting unaffected. It would wreck it".

I accept that as a statement of opinion. It can be held genuinely and sincerely. However, such an assertion must be backed up with some form of analysis and justification. What do we have? The editorial continued:

"If Mrs. Thatcher is not prepared to accept that warning from the BBC . . . then perhaps she should pay heed to the equally serious forebodings expressed by those in the free enterprise sector of the industry."

The support of the BBC is prayed in aid, as is the support of the independent television companies. The same vein of rigorous analysis continues:

"She might also reflect on the fact that the last politician to bring forward a proposal almost identical to her own was Mr. Tony Benn: he, too, professed not to want to swamp the airwaves with advertising — he simply, until defeated in a Labour Cabinet, proclaimed his desire to see the principle established."

[Mr. Francis Maude]

It is a curious reflection for *The Observer*, whose distaste for the adversarial nature of politics is well known, to assume that because one part of the Labour party has at some stage supported this issue it ought to be axiomatic that the Government oppose it. The editorial claims to set out the case against advertising in the BBC and yet t is devoid of any justification, analysis or reasoned support for that case. It continues;

"The truth is that—perhaps more by luck than foresight—Britain happens to have almost the ideal 'mix' in at least one sector of its communications industry: on the one side, a lately somewhat complacent public service corporation and, on the other, a highly competitive free enterprise system."

Again, a bald assertion of opinion. The argument just does not measure up to what the public perceive to be the case. The BBC lost its innocence in regard to commercialism a long time ago. Every year, come the run-up to Christmas, we have the unedifying spectacle of the BBC announcing its Christmas line-up with all of the razzmatazz that is attached to commercialism. It competes directly with the ITV companies. It competes, but without the sort of financial discipline that accompanies proper competition in a free market. At the end of the day, the BBC cannot go bankrupt, because it comes back to the Home Office for another subvention — another increase in the compulsory levy on everyone who owns a television set. Similarly, the ITV companies do not operate—as *The Observer* maintains — within a highly competitive framework. They are a private monopoly.

I am not one of those who maintain that the BBC is terribly wasteful and extravagant, without any financial discipline. I accept that there have been attempts to impose some sort of financial discipline in the BBC. I also accept the argument of those who say, "If you want to see overmanning, bad labour practices and wastefulness, don't look at the BBC but at the independent television companies." That is absolutely right. The wastefulness is far greater there, and the reason is perfectly straightforward. There is no competition and the independent television companies operate a monopoly.

There is far too much advertising chasing far too little advertising time in the independent television sector, with the result that prices are sky-high. The independent companies can charge whatever they like, because advertisers have nowhere else to go to get the same sort of coverage. Consequently, the independent companies operate without any sort of cost discipline. As well as having an effect on the quality of broadcasting, this also has a consequence on the cost of the product advertised. There is a direct public interest in that.

In anything purporting to be a free market there must be advertising. The direct consequence of restricting access to the advertising media is that the cost of the products in the market place is artificially increased. We must address ourselves to the direct public interest in that matter.

I hope that I have shown that within the present broadcasting structure there is a failure of the sort of liberal consensus that has existed for so long. At present there is a compulsory levy on everyone who owns a television set. That operates whether or not the owner ever turns on to BB1 or 2. He may watch nothing but ITV programmes, and all the evidence suggests that more people watch ITV programmes than BBC. None the less, everyone must pay the levy. That is nothing short of immoral.

Every three years the BBC comes round with the begging bowl. No doubt an agreement will be made between the Government and the BBC, and the licence fee for the forthcoming three years will be set at somewhere between the present levy and the bid. That is a shabby and unsatisfactory way of regulating a most important part of our public life. We must urgently press for the introduction of advertising into the BBC. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West suggests, it could be done gradually rather than all at once. There could be a phasing out of the licence fee over several years, but at the end of that process I want to see the complete abolition of the licence fee and the funding of public sector broadcasting from advertising.

I know that some people maintain that we could not fund Radio 3 and Radio 4, and possibly BBC 2, from advertising. There may be some justification for that point of view, but to those who say that minority interests cannot be catered for in minority programmes within a commercial framework I would point out that Channel 4, although it was quite rightly criticised at its inception, caters for a large number of minority interests within a commercial framework. To those who say that BBC2 is so sacred and important that it cannot be sullied with commercialism I say that we should try it and see. I believe that it can be properly funded within a commercial framework.

As for Radio 3 and Radio 4, if eventually the conclusion is reached that they cannot be operated within a commercial framework I believe we ought to accept it and fund them out of general taxation. As a proportion of the total BBC budget the cost is tiny. The additional subvention from the Treasury would be minuscule, but it would release anybody who owns a television set from the tyranny of the levy.

The case for keeping advertising out of the BBC has been shown to be wanting in every respect. By its increasing readiness to incorporate advertising for its own products and services within its programmes the BBC has shown that it is not averse to the commercial spirit. It is a gross insult to the dedication and impartiality of those who work in the BBC and to those who acknowledge the need for impartiality and quality in broadcasting to say that to introduce commercialisation is to destroy the public service ethic. The case against advertising has not been made. The case for advertising becomes more potent and cogent as time goes on. I hope that the Minister will be able to indicate that the question is being most urgently addressed and that preliminary conclusions may be reached before the inevitable increase in the licence fee.

5.32 am

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. May I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on having secured the debate and having given us the opportunity to raise this important matter.

If one is discussing the funding of any television network there are a number of options: first to fund it from taxation, secondly to fund it from advertising, and thirdly to look towards some kind of subscription basis of funding, by direct charging or otherwise. Whatever the method of funding of the television network, surely in common with all other businesses its future must depend upon being able to respond to the demands of its

customers, in this case its audience. By far the worst possible system is that which is based upon a licence fee. That guarantees stability of income, regardless of the quality of programmes. Advertising, whatever the élitist arguments presented against it might be, has the merit that it is an improvement on the present system of responding to customer demand.

My principal criticism of the licensing system is that it allows no relationship whatever to occur between consumption and the price charged or between quality and the demands of the consumer. The consumer is left with no way of expressing a preference. The only way is to write to "Points of View", but that is hardly the type of preference that I would expect hon. Members of my party to regard as legitimate.

Another more serious objection — although it is a feature of our system of government that we have been able to avoid — is what is affectionately known in the trade as the Carrickmore syndrome. I was unaware of it until I undertook research when preparing for the debate. It refers to the incident in 1979 when the BBC filmed an IRA show of strength in the village of Carrickmore. The Government quite rightly protested about this excess. It happened to be an incident which occurred in the middle of the discussions on the licence fee. The BBC dropped the film and it was suggested that it did so because it was worried about the licence fee increase. Scurrilous as that suggestion might have been, it is worrying to have a broadcasting system that is open to the criticism that it depends on the good will of the Government of the day to secure its funds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West said that the BBC was no innocent virgin in advertising and commercialism. I have had a number of visits from constituents who have expressed their strong objection to the proposed increase in licence fees. I have also had visits from people who are opposed to advertising, but they did not object for the same reasons as some of the high-flown advocates on the other side of this argument. They complained that advertising would interrupt the programmes. My perception is that programmes are constantly interrupted by commercial breaks for the BBC's own products and programmes.

Indeed, I suggest that the commercial break is useful, because it gives one — or one's wife — the opportunity to put the kettle on.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: That was a very sexist remark.

Mr. Forsyth: I apologise to the hon. Member. It was meant to be descriptive rather than sexist.

The fact that we see sponsorship at sporting events, such as football matches, shows that the rot has already set in. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West referred to the number of products that the BBC markets. It is suggested that quality would suffer if advertising were introduced, but I believe that some programmes would benefit from the introduction of advertising and would certainly not be disrupted by it. For example, it would be useful to have advertisements between horse races. I cannot see that that would destroy the fabric or the creativity of programmes or justify any of the other bogus arguments that are put forward.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Is that not particularly the case with Radio 1 and Radio 2? The jingles would be part of the atmosphere, as they are on commercial radio. The atmosphere is part of the reason why so many young people listen to commercial radio.

Mr. Forsyth: That was an extremely helpful intervention. I do not often listen to Radio 1 or Radio 2. I find the commercial stations much better.

We should be suspicious of the BBC's self-indulgent, self-congratulatory attitude. My hon. Friends have been much kinder to the BBC than I shall be. The argument that the corporation is the pinnacle of broadcasting has yet to be proved. These matters are subjective, but it seems to me that on news coverage, current affairs and investigative reporting, ITV takes the BBC by storm and is much more effective. If hon. Members choose something a little closer to home, I believe that the ITV coverage of general elections has consistently been better than that of the BBC. The ITV coverage of the recent American elections was masterful. On the BBC there was only a cosy anti-Reagan fireside chat, with little information being provided for those of us who were looking for the high ground that the BBC claims to occupy.

The argument that advertising would debase the quality of programmes hardly stands up when one switches on and sees shows of the calibre of "Blankety Blank" and other quiz programmes broadcast by the BBC. Mention has been made of the rejigging of programmes around "The Thornbirds". I seem to recall that the BBC spent a very considerable sum on securing that, I believe Australian, soap opera. Again, it would not fit the description of the high ground.

I would not describe Channel 4's broadcasting as broadcasting of the lowest possible denominator, yet advertising obviously plays its part there. I may have missed the point because I do not watch it frequently, but I would not describe breakfast television as particularly elevating. The Fleet street newspapers compete for advertising, yet they still seem capable of producing quality newspapers. Judging by the editorials, some of them are improving before our very eyes.

The fact is that the argument about quality is purely an elitist argument to prop up the view that there are one or two people in the BBC who know what a quality programme is, and what is best for the viewing public. They are entitled to their opinions, but hon. Members should look at their performance records. They show that they are extremely sensitive to audience ratings. By their own actions, they admit that the best test of effective broadcasting and quality is the extent of high ratings. One of the unfortunate aspects of the argument is that the high ratings are considered a criticism and something that should be despised. On the contrary, they should be sought after, because they show that there are satisfied customers.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) asked whether there would be enough advertising. I notice that the director-general of the BBC was recently quoted as saying that local newspapers would suffer as a result of introducing advertising into the BBC. That was a new and very welcome demonstration of concern for local papers by the BBC. I am sure that we all appreciate that. But I seem to recall that the same argument was used by local newspapers against commercial television and radio in the early days. It was then argued that if there was advertising on radio and television, it would take away business from the newspapers, and would mean the end of civilisation as we know it.

[Mr. Forsyth]

We know that that was a totally bogus argument. Far from taking away advertising, the increase in commercial advertising in broadcasting in turn increased demand for advertising in the local press, as it resulted in tie-up advertising and marketing. The principal source of the argument about the volume of advertising has been the independent television producers. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) eloquently described how the interests coincided. People are desperately keen to preserve the monopoly. I have always been on the fringes of advertising, but those whom I know in that world very much resent that monopoly. It is used to say, "Take it or leave it. This is the price and this is the slot." Incidentally, some of the most expensive advertising on ITV is in the slots that block some of the best and most prestigious programmes on BBC. Anyone who has been interviewed at home by ITV must have been astonished by the number of cars and the people who emerge from them with clipboards but, who appear to have no particular function.

Wages in the independent television companies have consistently gone up at an astonishing rate—about 35 per cent. above the BBC rate. We are told that that is why the BBC finds it difficult to compete, that it trains all the people and that they then go off to ITV. Therefore, it is said, it needs more money to attract them back. It is a self-fulfilling spiral which is going downwards and which can only be broken by competition. It is a system that has allowed restrictive practices to grow and that has been to the detriment of both commercial and public broadcasting.

The argument about whether there is enough advertising available in the market is ridiculous when it is seen in the context of the fact that a mere 15 minutes a day for the BBC would bring in £50 million a year. We are not talking about wall to wall advertising from the start of broadcasting to the finish.

One or two anomalies exist within the licensing system which are unfair. It is impossible to defend the fact that a pensioner, regardless of income, will have to pay the proposed £65 licence fee. It becomes even harder to defend when it is recognised that if that pensioner lives in a sheltered housing scheme he would have to pay only £5 a year, provided the sheltered housing scheme is in the public sector. If the pensioner lived in one of the splendid examples of a private sheltered housing scheme put up around the country, he and every other pensioner in that scheme would have to pay the full licence. That cannot be fair.

The licensing system is questionable when one looks at the costs of collection. I understand that the cost of collecting is about 6 per cent., which is high when compared with, say, income tax, at 2 per cent.

Having put the case for advertising, let me mention the possibility of a subscription scheme, because I do not think that that has come into the debate, either outside or inside the House. The licence started as a subscription scheme. It was only as part of the wheeling and dealing done by the Government of the day in the days when it was necessary to give something in return for taking away a monopoly — a curious notion — when the BBC's monopoly on television broadcasting was removed to allow the ITV companies to come into existence, that the subscription system was changed to a licensing system, or, in effect, a poll tax on people with sets. It was part of the quid pro quo.

There is nothing in the world to prevent the BBC from allowing existing licences to expire and in 12 months we could scramble the signal. Having been so hard on the BBC, I do not want to imply that I am trying to ensure that nobody is capable of receiving its programmes any more. Newsagents and normal retail outlets could market a small device to put between the aerial socket and the television to unscramble the signal, for which a monthly rental or flat charge is paid. To deal with piracy, and so on, the scrambling could be altered and a new device could be obtained every two or three months.

That would have the happy advantage of preventing the BBC from padding out the summer with those repeats of repeats of repeats which no one wants to watch, because presumably no one would go along to their newsagent and buy the delightful device to unscramble the programmes. The BBC would have an incentive to ensure that it kept its subscribers.

I know that arguments against that will be advanced. I know that people will say it would be unfair, that the BBC would have to think about its customers, market itself, and be responsible to consumer demand. I know that those arguments will be advanced against the proposal, but they are precisely the arguments that I would advance in favour of it.

There is a further anomaly. I confess that I have not done my homework as well as I should have liked. I understand from a constituent who wrote to me this week that at every sitting of a court in my constituency there are about a dozen cases of people who have forgotten to buy television licences and have been caught by detector vans. The normal procedure is to fine them about £5 for each month for which the payment is outstanding, and to make them pay the back-duty on the fee. I understand that the latter payment goes to the court, not to the BBC, which is in contrast with the system that operates for vehicle licence dodging. As a result, the BBC is losing considerable amounts of revenue. As a gesture to its empty coffers, I suggest that that should be examined, if the present licence system, which I do not support, is to continue.

The debate this morning and the recent debate in the press and elsewhere provides us with an opportunity. Public opinion is on the side of those who think that the licensing system has been tested to destruction. There is a serious problem in the BBC, which relates to its decreasing cost-effectiveness. Since 1971 its income has romped well ahead of inflation. Licences have increased in number from 16 million to 18·5 million. Colour licences, which are about three times the price of black and white licences, have increased from 4 per cent. to 80 per cent. of licences. The BBC has, therefore, had an enormous increase in revenue.

Now the total number of licences is in decline. We have had five increases in the seven years between 1975 and 1981, compared with seven in the previous 50 years. The BBC told the Annan committee that with 8 per cent. inflation it would need a 25 per cent. increase in the licence fee every three years. This year with 5 per cent. inflation, it wants a 30 per cent. increase—that is three years after a 35 per cent. increase.

The time has come to think about radical action in terms of commercialising the BBC. Even in the present political

crisis it is astonishing to find senior figures in the BBC saying, "Ah well, the problem is all those people with car radios. We need a car radio tax. It would be simple. We would just put a little green band on the tax disc of the motor cars of those who had paid their car radio fee. It is tremendous value because there are millions of car radios and the cost would be only ½p a week. People should be made to contribute towards that." Even now they are pumping the same old argument, which no longer has credibility. Auntie is in desperate need of surgery.

BBC 1, BBC 2 and breakfast TV could be hived off as a separate company. The board of governors of the BBC should be turned into a sort of IBA. It should ensure that matters go right, but it should not be involved commercially. That entity could then be funded entirely by advertising without any difficulty. I accept that there is a problem about getting all the revenue from advertising for BBC 2. However, a combination of subsidy from BBC 1 and breakfast TV — it is questionable whether breakfast TV is a viable proposition—sponsorship and subscription could fund BBC 2.

There may also be merit in hiving off BBC Television News as a separate entity that could sell its product in the way that Independent Radio News does for the commercial radio stations. My hon. Friends the Members for Hertfordshire, West and for Warwickshire, North made a convincing case for advertising on Radio 1 and Radio 2. I believe that they should be sold off lock, stock and barrel, because they are ideally placed to be operated as private concerns. There is no possible case for their being operated by the state.

I recognise the special position of Radio 3 and Radio 4, but their funding could easily be organised through a combination of sponsorship and subscription on the lines of the public broadcasting service in the United States. As for BBC local radio, I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister that in all the research that I have carried out, and in all the thinking I have done, I cannot find a single argument for that service being run by the BBC. It should be privatised, preferably through management buy-outs, or simply by the highest bidder taking all.

If I may be allowed a regional reference, BBC Scotland, BBC Wales and BBC Ulster could be funded from advertising, and private capital could be introduced. There is no reason why the board of governors of the BBC should not still ensure the quality of programmes.

Perhaps I may be allowed one reactionary proposal in my suggested programme of radical reform. It would be a grave mistake to alter the basis of the BBC external services. The case for retaining it under the control of the BBC, and funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is overwhelming. Indeed, that service—the one for which there is a strong case for public broadcasting —is consistently damaged as a result of our exercises to restrain public expenditure. There is a strong case for giving that service more resources, which could be saved from the other action that I propose.

This is a great opportunity for the Government to sort out, once and for all, the licence problem. It would command the support of the vast majority of British people. Even some Opposition Members argue the case for advertising — something that I did not believe would happen in this Parliament, if ever. That is a recognition that advertising would not sound the death knell of the BBC and that there is an opportunity for change. Some Conservative Members are extremely worried by the noises being made in Government. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said some extremely encouraging things about advertising, but we have also heard the echo, "Yes, we will settle the licence fee this time, and we will think about advertising next year." No doubt that echo will disappear into the mists of, "We have an election coming", and all the other arguments that have been used to delay good ideas. The echo will result in reverberations from many hon. Members, who want the Government to seize this opportunity.

5.58 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on his success in the ballot, and on enabling several hon. Members to articulate the worries of many members of the public. It is significant that all those who have spoken in the debate so far are new Members of Parliament. They represent the new thinking among the public on this issue.

I am concerned about this matter for four reasons. First, I believe that we should respond to public demand on this issue. As far as possible, Members of Parliament should reflect the views of their constituents, and there is no doubt from the excellent statistics and polls that the public want change in this sector.

Secondly, I am naturally opposed to compulsory levies in principle, and at the moment we have a compulsory levy on anyone who has a television set in his home.

Thirdly, I want to bring more competition into advertising. At the moment, advertising is a monopoly of the independent sector, and that is leading to higher costs than would be the case if there were more competition.

Fourthly, I am concerned about the BBC licence fee being increased to anything like the level that it requests in its application. Figures such as 0·5 per cent. on the retail price index have been quoted, and that would lead to about £150 million extra public expenditure, with the knock-on effect on benefits, which are tied to the RPI.

I do not agree with the three-year agreement proposal. We should be looking for a one-year agreement. In the meantime, we should be discussing alternative funding and a long-term solution that will eliminate the need for a licence fee.

Whenever one challenges public sector sacred cows, there are always people who complain and predict doom and gloom. There was an interesting article in *The Times* by Bernard Levin not long ago, in which he told those of us who are too young to remember what happened in the 1950s in the debate over the creation of an independent television network. He said:

"As the debate got under way, such demotic figures as Lord Waverley, Lord Halifax, Lord Brand and Lady Violet Bonham-Carter denounced the proposal as certain to corrupt the popular taste, of which they had always, of course, been such conspicuous guardians. Lord Hailsham envisaged 'Caliban emerging from his slimy cavern'; Lord Esher foresaw the nation plunged 'into a planned and premediated orgy of vulgarity'; Lord Mathers shrank from the horror of young people seeing on their screens such foul slogans as 'Beer is Best'; Mr. Scholefield Allan, MP, described the never-forgotten revulsion he had experienced when he had heard, on Radio Luxembourg, an advertisement immediately preceding a Beethoven symphony; Herbert Morrison threatened that a future Labour government might abolish ITV altogether; Beverley Baxter shuddered at the thought that an advertisement might feature a man extolling a deodorant.

Advertising-funded television arrived, and the skies did not fall."

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

The public realise that that is the reality. We have been experiencing a self-interested lobby by the BBC, which is trying to prevent Members of Parliament from taking cognisance of what people think.

The effect of the advertising monopoly has already been referred to by a number of my hon. Friends. The restrictive practices and high wage rates that exist in the television world are renowned. I shall refer to an article that Mr. Max Hastings wrote in the *Standard* on 25 October 1984. He was talking about the dispute that brought Thames Television to a halt for several consecutive days. He spoke of the "absurdly high" salaries in ITV and the "absurdly unrealistic" work practices, which were matched only in the press industry. The difference between Fleet street and the BBC is that one does not have to pay a compulsory amount every day for a newpaper. Many people choose not to buy a newspaper, but those who have a television set are compelled to pay a licence fee, even if they do not wish to watch BBC. Mr. Hastings said that ITV has really had a licence to print money when so much revenue was coming that nothing seemed to matter but continuing to churn out programmes at any cost. He also said:

"Once created, the system became enshrined in tradition. In the past few years, all producers of television have become deeply concerned by cost escalations, running far ahead on inflation. Yet none has made significant progress in persuading its employees to adopt more realistic practices.

With ITV film cameramen making around £40,000 a year, some electricians even more than this, film editors the right side of £20,000, relatively unskilled sound and camera assistants closer to £30,000, there is room for everybody on the gravy train.

The impact on film-making caused by overtime agreements is soul-destroying. Once the basic day has been worked, every hour thereafter the scale of technicians' earnings multiply until they reach a level four or five times basic rates.

There are 'pocket money' agreements for crews working abroad even when all their expenses are being paid, meal-break deals and rest-period arrangements of fantastic complexity. Only a handful of technicians are willing to be flexible about interpreting their rights."

Mr. Hastings went on to say:

"The irony is that BBC, with its resolute determination to yield nothing to the commercial principle, is sinking into ever-deeper financial problems, which in turn make for worse programmes, which in turn make for lower ratings.

ITV, wallowing in advertising revenue, is riding so high in the ratings that any contractors are desperate to see an improvement in the BBC's fortunes, before the Government steps in to cream off yet more of commercial TV's profits.

Last weekend, we were given our first frontal nude on that most loathsomely exploitative of all soap operas, Tenko. Do we call this an opening shot in the BBC's great ratings fight-back?"

If the restrictive practices, overmanning and high wages were occurring solely in the independent television companies, perhaps that would be of relatively little concern compared with what is happening now. Unfortunately, these same practices are occurring in the BBC. Mr. Woodrow Wyatt, writing in *The Times* on 6 October, said that, contrary to some opinions, the BBC has even more staffing than the independent sector. He then said:

"The BBC has a staff of some 29,000. Commercial broadcasting with a comparable television output and a radio network, employs fewer than 20,000. The BBC, a bureaucracy not concerned with maximising profits, probably employs a staff about one third more than if it were a commercial organisation."

Because there is an advertising monopoly, the independent channels are able to make extra profits by pushing up the advertising rates far ahead of the rate of inflation. Their work force then demands an extra share of those profits, and as a result, the BBC finds that it has to pay staff extra to compete. It is a vicious circle in which the consumer comes out worst and the monopoly unions operate to good effect for their members who are lucky enough to work in those industries.

Many of the people who oppose advertising on the BBC suggest that there would need to be a massive amount of advertising to have an impact. One of the points coming through in this welcome debate is that a relatively modest amount of advertising would suffice. Advertising for one minute 20 seconds in an hour would obviate the need to increase the fee. Advertising for only one minute 20 seconds in an hour would not mean that programmes have to be interrupted by advertisements. Advertisements could be placed between programmes. I believe that there would be wide public acceptance of a modest amount of advertising, even if, to start with, there was advertising only on BBC 1. That would leave BBC 2 to operate more like the public broadcasting service that operates in the United States.

I am worried about the negotiations for a three-year licence agreement. It means that any agreed licence fee will be that much higher than if it were a one-year agreement. I have already illustrated the adverse effect that that would have on the Government's policy of keeping down inflation. It also means that the welcome public debate on the subject would close as soon as a new three-year agreement was reached. I implore the Government to recognise that it is now too late to rejig the whole thing before March next year when the licence fee must be agreed. They should say that the BBC will have a one-year agreement only and that the extra time will be used for increased public debate, which I hope will result in a Bill being brought before the House and lead to the complete phasing out of the BBC television licence fee.

We have all heard about the effect of the licence fee on pensioners, people on fixed incomes, and so on. A counter-argument is that, because the licence fee would be reflected in the retail price index, pensioners would receive extra on their pensions each week from which they would be expected to meet the additional cost of the licence. In the real world it will not be like that. When it comes to paying the increased fee, pensioners will ask how they can pay for it out of their limited incomes. I sympathise with pensioners who live on fixed incomes and who are worried about this matter.

We should give all pensioner households a 5p licence, or do away with the licence. At the moment we fall between two stools. We say that the pensioner who lives in council-run sheltered accommodation is entitled to a 5p licence, whereas the pensioner who lives in a rented flat on his or her own, who probably has costs additional to those of the first one I mentioned, must pay the full licence fee.

There is one anomaly after another. Everything the Government do to try to resolve the matter leads to further anomalies, because the impact on the licence fee for everyone else if every pensioner could have a 5p licence would be so great that people would take to the streets to protest.

That is why my hon. Friends and most members of the public believe that we should eliminate the licence fee. We should not be content with half measures which lead to the problems we have had with dog licences, where the cost of collecting the fee becomes progressively a higher

proportion of the revenue raised and people ask whether it is worth collecting. We should have a programme to phase out the licence fee.

If we could go to the people and say that in three, four or five years the licence fee would be eliminated, we would effectively be giving £1 per week extra to almost every householder to spend as he wished. That would be in accordance with Conservative philosophy and, I hope, with Government policy.

We know how people have been agonising recently about the £1 per week reduction in the increase in heating allowance. The Labour party spokesman on this issue is not prepared to say that phasing out the licence fee will give back £1 a week to householders.

In another article in *The Spectator*, Mr. Paul Johnson wrote about the "stone age BBC". He said:

"At present the BBC's obstinacy in accepting advertisements has no more foundation in reason and economics than Arthur Scargill's refusal to accept pit closures."

I agree with that. It is no doubt because the Labour party agrees with him that it is embracing the policy of repealing any proposals to introduce advertising into the BBC in the same supine way as it has been supporting Mr. Arthur Scargill.

I hope that, as a result of the debate, there will be a further debate before the BBC's licence fee increase application is approved. I hope, too, that the Government will introduce proposals for a one-year increase and a wide-scale public debate that will lead to the phasing out of the licence fee for ever.

6.15 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on his initiative in bringing the debate before the House. My hon. Friend has demonstrated his acute sensitivity to popular concern. The fact that we are debating a matter of great concern to the public is borne out by press comment, public opinion surveys and letters received by many of my colleagues and me about the BBC, its financing and the proposed increases in licence fees.

The debate is extremely relevant and timely, because the BBC is mounting a campaign in support of its desire for a large increase in the licence fee. It is appropriate that we should have an early opportunity to discuss and consider the implications of the proposed increase before a decision is reached. The fact that the debate has been allowed to continue for three hours reflects the concern that is felt among hon. Members about the issue and their desire to express themselves and debate the principles involved.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on his contribution to the debate, the persuasiveness of his arguments and the general thrust of his contentions, which in general I strongly endorse. I endorse his remarks on the many good features of the BBC, its employees and its services. I have always found myself most courteously, fairly and fully treated by the BBC, and any criticism that I make of the system and its financing does not stem from a personal axe that I might wish to grind.

On the other hand, I must observe that the political nexus that the present financing system creates is one that runs to the detriment of both the BBC and Members of Parliament. The BBC rightly resents having to come almost on bended knee for increases in its revenue. I am sure that it would prefer a system where it was free of any possible political colouring and judgment. At the same time, I have heard colleagues say in private that they might not wish to be heard to be objecting too strongly to the BBC's request for a licence fee increase for fear that that might jeopardise their chances of being represented by the corporation. The political nexus bites both ways and I am sure that any means that was found to break free of it would be welcomed.

There is a strongly principled argument against any increase in the licence fee. I think especially of those of my constituents—a high proportion of them—who are unemployed, elderly or on low incomes. The ability to watch television is one of the few luxuries that they are able to afford. It might even be described as a necessity for those who have time on their hands and little to occupy it with. They have to pay for this "luxury" what is already a high rent when it is set against their income band.

The BBC is pressing a case to increase the licence fee to £65 a year, an increase of £19, or about 41 per cent. That would be an extremely large increase bearing in mind the present rate of inflation and increases in costs elsewhere. It is equivalent to a back-door tax increase of over 40p a week, which is considerable, and would be rightly condemned were it to fall in any other way.

I regard the proposal for an increase in the licence fee as quite unacceptable. After all, it is already a high enough hurdle to overcome to change from not having a television to having one. A family has to afford the capital cost of either buying the apparatus or entering into the rental agreement, and then has to pay an already large licence fee. To widen the gap between those who do not have and those who do have a television service would be iniquitous, but to load on to each year that extra payment, making a heavy annual cost, is unacceptable to the many people to whom television is so vital. They have no choice in any case over the cost of the service because, unlike virtually any other product, they cannot turn elsewhere to a competitive product and pay slightly less, perhaps for something of less quality, or even something of higher quality that offers a better bargain.

For the purposes of these arguments, I completely dismiss the suggestion that black and white television is in some sense an alternative to which one can subscribe at a lesser rate, for two reasons. The first is that it bears absolutely no relevance to the provision cost because, from the point of view of the corporation and others, it is exactly the same, whether the receiver happens to be black and white or colour. Secondly, these days, with the importance of the colour aspect of television acknowledged right throughout transmission, for someone to be expected to have to make do with black and white television is to reduce the quality of reception so far that it makes a mockery of the provision of the service.

There is also the aspect of the cost of the collection of the licence, which has been mentioned by many of my hon. Friends in the debate. The detection and collection cost is estimated by the BBC to be around 7 per cent. of the total cost of licence collection in the coming year, which is an enormous percentage if one compares it with alternative forms of taxation or revenue collection. The number of people that the BBC estimates are not at present in possession of a licence but are in possession of the facility to receive transmissions is around 1·5 million, despite the massive increase in detection facilities and warnings issued by advertising and other means, which the

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BBC is wont to do from time to time. Nevertheless, that large figure is one that I fear will only increase if the licence fee goes up and the larger the increase in the licence fee, predictably, the larger the increase will be in the number of people attempting to get round paying.

The licence fee system has no link to usage of the service. It is not in any sense measured by the amount someone is prepared to listen to the BBC, which benefits from the revenue, as opposed to its independent competitors. I should like to refer now to linkage to use. It is of course a fact that many people might happily watch independent television and not the BBC, and listen to commercial radio, and not the BBC radio, and be quite happy with the provision that they get from the independent sector, yet still have to pay the full amount of the licence fee. They are effectively paying for nothing because they are not benefiting from or receiving the service paid for out of the licence revenue. They are using their equipment to pick up broadcasts that come from, and are funded from, entirely different sources.

There may also be people who do not receive television and do not pay a licence fee but who listen to BBC radio every hour of their waking day and even perhaps when they are asleep, and thus benefit from a service subsidised by the people watching independent television. The licence fee system is completely unmeasured, almost irrelevant, and bears no relation to actual use.

There have been dramatic changes in broadcasting and in communications generally in the past 20 years and there is no doubt that change will continue and indeed accelerate. I just about remember the days when the BBC had a complete monopoly as sole supplier of broadcasting. Some hon. Members' memories may go back even further. I certainly remember the days when one relaxed in the comforting arms of "Auntie" BBC knowing the standard of service that would be provided and regarding it as something sacrosanct that would never change.

Nevertheless, things changed and, although some horror was expressed before independent television and later commercial radio came on the air, both services have proved extremely popular as well as being free to the listener or viewer. Commercial radio was preceded by pirate radio—a sure sign if ever there was one that the market was cramped and unable to deal with the demand that had arisen. Were the fears of poor standards expressed before pirate radio became commercial radio ever justified? I believe that they clearly were not. In any case, what are absolute standards in broadcasting? I find myself questioning the whole concept, but I shall return to that later.

Far from being unpopular, both commercial radio and commercial television were highly popular and much desired. Far from hating the advertisements, as had been suggested, people liked them. According to a recent survey, about 77 per cent. of people actually enjoy watching or listening to the advertisements. As has been pointed out, there are added advantages—including the provision of a break in which one's spouse, of whatever sex, can make tea. The present system is an anachronism. The licence fee is no longer relevant, as it may once have been. Nor is the organisation of the BBC, to which the system is intimately related, ideal for the 1980s, let alone the 1990s and beyond.

Where do we go from here? First, we must look not to the past or the present but to the future and try to anticipate what will happen in broadcasting in general. I think that there will be massive changes. The BBC and broadcasting in general cannot resist direct broadcasting by satellite even if it wished to do so. There will also be competition from cable television. The BBC cannot resist more broadcasting. I have no doubt that in due course domestic viewers here will be able to pick up broadcasts from other countries and, probably via satellite, some of the main United States television channels which, as they broadcast in our language, would be immediately applicable to British audiences.

I do not doubt that before long we shall see the setting up of trans-national television, aiming not just at one country but at a number of countries. Channels such as the music and television network in the United States—which is the television equivalent of Radio 1 or some of the commercial radio stations—will inevitably catch on here sooner or later, and they could have trans-national applications. The BBC could not keep up with all those developments and corner all those markets, even assuming that it would wish to do so, which I do not believe that it would.

The BBC suffers from inherited problems. It suffers from having been an empire and also from the desire—almost the obligation—to participate in all the new applications and developments, because it always has done so in the past. As broadcasting moves into the future, the BBC always seems to want to fight its own Star Wars in the ether. One might more appropriately say that the empire is always wanting to strike back. From the days of VHF and stereo radio to those of the broader remit covering the production of its own films, records, music and video tapes, from the technical support side of television and radio to the second television channel, local radio, DBS and breakfast television—the BBC has shown an interest in everything that one can name, and tried to enter the field. I am sure that if the resources were available—the will would certainly be there—the BBC would like to launch its own satellites to provide for DBS.

A line must be drawn. There are fields that the BBC cannot reasonably enter, and things that it cannot afford to do. Inevitably, its share of the broadcasting market will slip. That cannot be helped. Whatever is done, it will attract less and less of the market. We will therefore find, if we maintain funding solely by licence, that the anomaly becomes greater and greater.

By asking for a huge licence increase this year, the BBC is, happily, opening the door to a complete review of its financial base and its structure. We should seize the opportunity to institute a timely reform of the whole provision of broadcasting by the BBC, in which we consider the broad issues of accountability and efficiency as well as financing.

Much has been done in the past few years with the telephone system. We need to open up broadcasting as widely as possible to competition, enterprise and freedom. By all means let us preserve the best of the BBC. I acknowledge that it has made great contribution to broadcasting and can contribute much in future. However, we should also give the viewers as many alternatives as possible and as fair a means of funding the various possibilities as can be provided.

One possible scenario would be very flexible. There would be a number of options that we could develop after

having tested the water. In the first stage, there would be no increase in the licence fee in the foreseeable future, and permission would be granted to the BBC to bring in limited advertising, perhaps first on Radios 1 and 2 and BBC 1. Those measures could be accompanied by a measure to prevent the BBC developing into new areas and perhaps an encouragement to it to contract out many of its internal activities and limit the growth of ancillary areas.

In the second stage, we could envisage the selling off of Radio 1 and Radio 2, which are perhaps the least credible from the point of view of the BBC's historic purpose and maintenance of standards. Coupled with that, we could extend free licences to the 4·7 million pensioners. The third stage could involve the possible selling off or breaking down into separate organisations of BBC 1 and local radio or of BBC 2, Radio 3 and Radio 4 which, for the foreseeable future, should be kept as they are. They could be subsidised by a reduced licence and perhaps accept some advertising.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My hon. Friend said that he would extend a free licence to the 4 million pensioners. Why has he singled out pensioners — they do not demonstrate need as a category? What about other groups, such as the unemployed?

Mr. Merchant: These proposals have a great element of flexibility. I do not want to narrow the argument by saying that only one sector of the population should benefit from a reduction in licence fees. I chose pensioners because it can be argued that they are most dependent on television. Moreover, they have probably paid more than most in licence fees.

The BBC is a monolithic organisation which has expanded into areas such as breakfast television that could not have been imagined only a few years ago. It is an unaccountable organisation in many ways and it is certainly uncompetitive. Many of its attitudes are paternalistic and anachronistic. It follows what it believes people should see rather than what they demonstrate that they want to see.

We should not kid ourselves on the argument about standards. Standards are a subjective element. The BBC might think that it has the answer, but many others might not agree. Is the BBC that good? It argues that it offers the highest standard of broadcasting in the world, but many disagree. Close examination of the BBC and a comparison with the independent networks show that many independent programmes are of higher quality. The argument that only the BBC offers the highest standards is no longer sustainable. Does the introduction of advertising mean that there will be an automatic reduction in standards? I do not think so. Indeed, I believe that adverts would be welcomed and improve the service.

Paternalism in broadcasting might have been satisfactory in the 1920s, during the war years and perhaps in the austerity that immediately followed the war. The spirit of today's age revolts against paternalism, monopoly, duopoly and everything that goes with them. We should imagine what would happen if Fleet street or the magazine empire were run by a subsidised monopoly that was not open to the market. There would be an outcry. In the interests of plurality, quality and choice, there should be a major review of the licence system, the funding of the BBC and its structure. There should not be an increase in the licence fee but a move towards its decrease. Above all, this would clearly be in the interests of the consumer and would provide more and better services, as well as greater choice, at a lower cost.

This is a fitting time for a complete review and the institution of radical reforms in broadcasting, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister of State to do all he can to achieve this in the near future.

6.40 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) because I did not hear his opening remarks. However, I have listened with great interest to the contributions of others of my hon. Friends, and there is not a lot with which I would disagree. Indeed, I would positively agree with the vast amount of what I have heard, because the general feeling is that, before the BBC is able to obtain any extra increase in its licence fee, at the very least some kind of inquiry into the funding of the organisation should be undertaken before we commit ourselves to what, on the face of it, could be a very large increase.

The BBC seems to suffer from an ever-spiralling increase in running costs. Because of our busy life, many hon. Members are unable to see the programme diet that is dished up day by day and week by week. On the odd occasions when I have been at home on a Saturday or Sunday evening, snuggled up by the fireside with my wife, I have found that the last thing worth watching and indulging in is television. That applies equally to the commercial channels, but time stands still on the BBC on a Saturday evening. It is hard to tell one Saturday from another, because the same programmes are shown each week. There is a quiz show, with the same panel and almost the same contestants. There is also a female police soap opera—each channel has one—and probably an old American film which is being shown for the fourth or fifth time. That is followed by soccer, or that other hideous cult programme — snooker. It may be that such a diet is welcomed by the viewer, but it leads me to question where all the money goes.

Recently there has been a contest between the commercial and state sectors over breakfast television. I am not sure that the financial moguls at the BBC did their costings correctly on whether the corporation could afford breakfast television, but no one asked me, and many others like me, about whether we were prepared to watch it. Having said that, I should add that many hon. Members on both sides of the House seem to enjoy appearing on the programmes. Nevertheless, breakfast television has added a great deal to the cost of the BBC's budget.

That was emphasised only yesterday, when the corporation began attempts to retain one of its prominent female anchor women. A salary of about £80,000 a year has been proposed, but that is not for a five-day working week. It has suggested that that would be for working every other week. That strikes me as money very badly spent.

In the west midlands, the BBC's contribution—Radio WM — is a worthwhile operation and well worth listening to, but whether it fulfils a demand within the area, which is adequately covered by commercial radio, leaves something to be desired. In some of its programmes, both on television and on the radio network,

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there are grounds for economies, and probably grounds for withdrawing from a market that is best left to the commercial sector.

As was mentioned earlier, the increase in the television licence fee plays its part in the pension increase, but it never works out quite like that. Those on supplementary long-term pension arrangements have this year suffered a £1 reduction in their pension. The proposed increase of 40p or 45p per week will therefore swallow up about 25 per cent. of their pension increase. It is very hard for some pensioners to accept that.

Some kind of licence fee is needed. I do not believe that it should be phased out completely, to be replaced by commercial advertising. However, we ought to look more closely at the dividing line between black and white and colour television reception. Apart from the receiver, virtually the same equipment is needed. Years ago, when colour television was the in thing, it undoubtedly cost the television contractors a great deal more to provide colour television. However, the extra cost of transmitting colour television has long since been absorbed. Therefore, the justification for two kinds of licence fee no longer obtains.

It is also wrong that elderly people who have difficulty in finding the extra money for a colour television licence should have to put up with black and white television. First, we should consider bringing closer together the cost of black and white and colour television licences. There should at least be a reduced fee for a colour television licence. If we consider also the contribution that advertising might make, we should be moving towards overcoming some of the BBC's financial problems.

Revenue from advertising does not destroy the quality of programmes. There are many good commercial television programmes. There is no evidence to suggest that advertising has reduced the standard or quality of that kind of programme. In the early years of commercial television the contractors indulged in sponsored programmes. They fell by the wayside. They were not part and parcel of the operating requirements of commercial contractors. Some of the magazine programmes, consisting of a half-hour presentation of new products, left a great deal to be desired. But there is no reason why the "Look at Life" and programmes of that kind should not be sponsored by oil or pharmaceutical companies. It would be a very convenient and cheap way for commercial contractors and BBC television to get hold of high quality programmes at a generally low cost. It would result in the provision of cheaper programmes without necessarily having to resort to the other form of advertising—the interruption in the middle of a programme. There are other ways of presenting a commercial partnership between industry and commerce and broadcasting than blatant advertising through subsidised or sponsored programmes.

The challenge that the broadcasting companies face throughout the remainder of the century is daunting. With the advent of satellite and cable television, there will be a much wider choice for viewers. The result will be that they will watch fewer programmes of the contractors who now present them. If viewers are faced with the prospect of paying a great deal more for watching BBC, they will not resent so much having to pay the price for watching a minority channel.

We must grasp the nettle. The licence fee should be reduced and there should be only one category. We should also allow the BBC to introduce sponsored programmes and ask it to look again at its radio sector and introduce commercial sponsorship, at least on Radio 1 and local radio. Indeed, it should also consider selling local radio stations, perhaps to the existing managements.

The debate is timely and I look forward to some positive action.

6.50 am

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) for initiating this timely debate. I am sorry that I was not here for his speech, but I know that he examines competition closely and that he likes the smack of firm competition and cost-effectiveness. I look forward to reading his speech in *Hansard*.

I am also grateful that Mr. Speaker allowed three hours for the debate, which should serve as a curtain-raiser for a full debate in the House on the licence fee and the future financing of the BBC before any firm decision is taken about whether we retain the licence fee for another year. I do not think that we should keep it for more than one year. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office is to reply to the debate. I know that he is aware of the pressures of the market and no doubt he will show us some of his wisdom in these matters.

Although this time of the morning is fairly uncongenial and uncomfortable for us, it is an appropriate time to debate the BBC, because the range of BBC broadcasting at this time of the day shows how the corporation seems to be trying to cut its own throat. The highest pressure is put on the listener and viewer by Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Radio 4 and breakfast television. They all compete fiercely for the captive audiences in British households and among people driving to work. There is further competition from the BBC's local radio stations. In some areas, two such stations overlap. That is an excessive coverage by the BBC.

We are moving into an era of new developments in broadcasting. The BBC has stated adamantly that it wants 50 per cent. of direct broadcasting by satellite. I believe that it would be acceptable for the BBC to have one third of DBS, with one third going to independent broadcasters and the remaining one third going to the commercial world in general. Nevertheless the BBC wishes to grab an excessive slice of the action there.

Then we have cable television—the new development for which the House legislated during the last Session. Again, that will put heavy pressure on the broadcasting world. Finally, there is the argument now for much more community local radio, with low-powered transmitters spread over a wide area of the country. The community is asking for true local stations, and that will once again increase the amount of broadcasting in Britain.

Those great developments are going on, and so it is wholly appropriate that we should now look afresh at where the BBC stands within the broadcasting world. How is the BBC to be financed? My hon. Friends have very adequately covered the main suggestion, which is that it should move towards some advertising. From what I have heard and read, and from programmes in which I have been involved during the past few weeks, I understand that to put it mildly, the BBC is running scared from the idea of any advertising on its networks.

The BBC's worry is wholly unfounded. It is argued that the quality of broadcasting will be reduced as a result of

advertising, but that is arrogance on the part of the BBC. Who would suggest that the programmes of independent television are of an inferior quality to those put out by the BBC? The truth is that all too often people tell us that independent television news — which is only part of independent television's output — is of a higher quality than that of the BBC. There can be no question but that the current affairs programmes and much of the entertainment put out by independent television are of a quality that is certainly equal to that seen on BBC.

Advertising already exists on the BBC. How many times do we sit in front of our television sets watching the BBC advertise the *Radio Times*, *The Listener*, BBC books, BBC video and radio tapes, not to mention BBC programmes? Indeed, great chunks of trailer material are put on at the junction of programmes. The British public are now perfectly accustomed to such advertising. It is advertising, although it is not paid commercial advertising. The British public are quite used to seeing that, and it would not think it unusual if commercial advertising was introduced into the same spaces between programmes or in the middle of them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) said, the polls and surveys show that many people find the advertisements carried on independent television highly acceptable productions, which are of a very high quality in terms of film work and general production. There is no harm in looking further at such advertising and at that sort of British standard of advertising on the BBC.

We are always being told that we shall get the standards of American trans-Atlantic television if we introduce such advertising. The same applies to trans-Atlantic radio. I do not believe that that will be the case.

As a former broadcaster, I have heard a great deal of that sort of thing from the other side of the Atlantic. Britain's broadcasting standards are now so firmly based that we are never likely to move to the constant churning out of commercials in the middle of a programme. We shall not have the experience which one so often has on the other side of the Atlantic.

I do not wish to delay the House, because all hon. Members wish to hear the Opposition's response, although they amount to only one Member at the moment. I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has just become two. Reinforcements have arrived. In addition, the House will wish to hear the response from the Home Office.

As I said at the beginning, the debate should simply be a curtain-raiser for a major debate on the matter before we proceed further. There is much worry, particularly in the minds of pensioners — I have many of those in my constituency — about the prospect of a £65 licence fee for a further three years. There is a worry about how much higher the figure will go. With the constant wish of the BBC to expand its empire, who knows where the BBC licence fee will go? At what point will it reach £100 a year and at what point will it go even higher? The problem cannot simply be tackled by the suggestions of some of my hon. Friends that we should move to curtail the activities of the BBC. This is the moment for a much more radical look at the financing of the BBC.

My hon. Friend the Minister may wish to know, if he does not already, that there are many producers and directors in the BBC who also wish that to happen. Let him not hold the idea that people within the corporation necessarily want to see the licence fee continued in Britain. They believe that for perhaps too long now resources have been tight because of the format of the licence fee. They would wish, in terms of some of the technological developments and in terms of their productions, to be able to see that the BBC's finance is on a truly competitive basis with the independent networks. If the Home Office is prepared to grasp that nettle and to have full discussion with hon. Members and with the wider public about the future financing of the BBC that will be welcome indeed.

I urge my hon. Friend, if he and his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary feels that the time is too short to move to something new within the next few months — I would understand that — to move to no more than one year of licence fees for the BBC. If the rumours of the £55 charge for the coming year are correct, that may be about right. At that point I would say to my hon. Friend that a full debate must take place in the House and among the public about the future.

7.4 am

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): I join hon. Gentlemen in congratulating the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on being fortunate enough to win the lottery for this debate, and on initiating an interesting, though albeit one-sided, debate on an extremely important subject. It is a pity that he spoiled his case by degenerating in part of his speech to a generalised attack on the British Broadcasting Corporation. A hostility to the BBC was shown overtly in some cases and implicitly in all the speeches from Conservative Members. Hon. Gentlemen also showed envy and jealousy at some of the salaries being earned by technicians, directors and performers.

The debate was obviously triggered by the BBC's application for an increase in the licence fee for the next three years, and by the report of the media policy group of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, which contains proposals to allow advertising on all BBC, radio and television channels. Clearly it has a sharp eye to its narrow self-interest and little thought for the needs of the BBC, ITV or viewers.

We are implacably and fundamentally opposed to the introduction of advertising on BBC radio and television. The introduction of advertising would damage the BBC, the ITV companies, local commercial radio and local provincial newspapers. Most important, it would substantially erode the standards of the BBC and ITV. If advertising were carried, some programme makers and schedulers would inevitably think — even if only unconsciously — that they had an obligation to those who were paying for the programmes and financially supporting advertising. That will affect the output and style——

Mr. Maude *rose*——

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I cannot give way. I am the only Opposition Member to speak and I have a great deal to say in what has been a one-sided debate. The hon. Gentleman and several of his hon. Friends spoke for a considerable time — indeed, far longer than I or the Minister will have to speak. I should like to give way and participate in debate, but hon. Gentlemen have prevented that.

The institution of advertising would also mean, the bigger the audience, the larger the income. Therefore,

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there would inevitably be pressure on broadcasters for high-rating programmes that attract the largest possible audiences and, therefore, the greatest income. We would have a constant diet of pap, such as Blankety Blank, which was derided by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), chat shows, and quiz programmes. They may be good of their kind and right in their place, but they are not the appropriate constant diet. We would be reduced to the appalling and abysmal level of television in the United States. The advent of advertising on the BBC would destroy public service broadcasting, of which the Labour party is rightly proud, and which is the envy of the rest of the world. We seek to protect the integrity of broadcasting, and not to destroy it through the introduction of advertising.

We cannot accept that there should be advertising on one part of the BBC or for a limited period during the day. To introduce any sort of advertising would be to embark on a dangerous slippery slope. It would provide a temptation for future Governments, when confronted with proposals from the BBC for an increase in the licence revenue, take the easy option and extend the range of advertising on the BBC.

Moreover, it is not merely the BBC's standards that are likely to be damaged. As many observers testify, there would be a struggle between the BBC and the independent television companies for what they say is a limited cake. I know that Conservative Members say that that is not the case, but it is a matter of judgment and belief.

On my side of the argument—Conservative Members have other evidence to adduce on their behalf—is the letter to *The Times* on 8 December 1984 from the chairman of Granada Television, Denis Forman. He says:

"All experienced broadcasters know that the introduction of advertising on BBC television is bound to lead to a struggle for revenue since there is not enough available to support more than one of the two major broadcasting systems . . . If the BBC were to have only five minutes of advertising each evening"—

more than one Conservative Member this evening has proposed something similar to that, implicitly recognising that there is something slightly disreputable about having advertising throughout the normal schedule—

"the result could be a drop of £110 million in the annual revenue of ITV. The profits of the ITV system in the last year were less than £100 million before levy and tax."

Of course, Mr. Forman has a vested interest, but he makes an important point. I would not have thought that Conservative Members would wish to damage ITV, just as they would not wish to damage the BBC. The Opposition would not wish to take steps to damage either.

Such remarks do not come only from those who have a vested interest in protecting the monopoly of the independent stations. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West quoted Mr. Rodney Harris, the media director of the advertising agency that is largely responsible for the current debate, D'Arcy MacManus and Masius. However, he did not quote all Mr. Harris's statement. He said, in the document provided to all Members of Parliament by the BBC:

"Not everyone has appreciated that if the BBC went commercial tomorrow and sold advertising at six minutes per hour of total broadcasting, as on ITV, that the ITV companies would all go bankrupt the day after tomorrow. Quite simply there is not enough advertising money to fund all UK broadcasting."

He was quoted by several Conservative Members in support of their case for advertising, and it ill becomes them to deride his judgment and his knowledge when I quote him in support of my case.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I also quoted the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but that does not mean that I agree with everything he says. People can be right in some places and wrong in others. That applies to Mr. Harris. It was an extreme case.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I do not quarrel with the hon. Gentleman. All that I am saying is that the introduction of advertising on the BBC would damage it. I also believe that it would damage the ITV companies. My belief—*[Interruption.]* I listened courteously to Conservative Members; I hope that they will extend similar courtesy to me. My assertion was based on the evidence produced by Rodney Harris and others. It is a belief; none of us could prove it one way or the other. The potential benefits, if there are any, of advertising on BBC television are outweighed by the potential dangers that I mentioned.

Not only Rodney Harris and Denis Forman, but Saatchi and Saatchi make my case for me. The latter's report, "Funding the BBC — The Case for Allowing Advertising", stated:

"The threat to radio is much more complex to define"—

I acknowledge that—

"but it can be said with some certainty . . . that there is a risk to ILR that might pose problems to the financial viability of some stations."

It is no more and no less than a risk, although it must be taken into account. To a large extent, it is irrelevant whether the onset of advertising on the BBC would damage the independent television companies, would ensue that there is a struggle for less advertising revenue, or would damage independent commercial radio and local newspapers. There are important additional considerations, but even if that argument could be sustained, we would still resort to the argument of principle that it is inappropriate and would be damaging to the best interests of public service broadcasting.

Nor is the suggestion appropriate that the BBC's revenue should be raised through taxation. It is superficially a much more attractive method because it is more simple, and less painful, and the cost would be less direct to the individual viewer. A progressive system of taxation is more fair than the licence fee, which is a regressive system that hits hardest those who are poor.

Mr. Maude *rose*——

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: I have already said why I cannot give way.

There are great dangers to the BBC in a taxation system of funding. Inevitably, it would quite properly be subject to Treasury control, and to scrutiny of its internal accounting system and policy decisions. It would be subject to Home Office accountability for expenditure on a detailed day-to-day basis. Once it is subject to Treasury and Home Office accountability, hon. Members would quite properly wish to subject it to parliamentary accountability, for instance on the efficacy of its programmes and particular stations. We might have a view as to whether particular stations should be closed. That is a dangerous road for any Government to go down, and no Government of either party have so far been prepared to tread it.

This has not been mentioned in the debate tonight, but in previous exchanges in the House, both at Question Time and in other debates, it has been pointed out that the universities have managed to retain their independence while being funded, through the University Grants Committee, by the Government. However, a great deal of the autonomy and independence of universities has been eroded, not least by the actions of this Government.

Therefore, we are left with the licence as the best, most appropriate and most sensible means of raising the revenue for the BBC. It is right that the Government should have to determine the overall level of licensing. Every hon. Member must know that this is an important and sensitive issue, and it is right and proper that the decision on the level of the licence should be a political one determined by the Government. They have the responsibility to determine the overall budget that they are prepared to provide to the BBC. They have to decide what is reasonable and appropriate in the economic circumstances of a given time, and match that to the needs of the BBC.

Mr. Chope: What does the hon. Gentleman think is the right level for the new licence fee?

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: The hon. Gentleman should not be silly. If he thinks that such a question will embarrass me or catch me out, he is being both naive and absurd, which can perhaps be accounted for by the lateness of the hour at which we are debating this issue.

Having made those decisions, the Government may decide on a figure that the BBC feels is not enough. However, it can then supply its own competing priorities in terms of programmes, capital and current investment, and it can determine its own functions. For example, it can decide whether it wishes to continue breakfast television or embark on more ambitious programmes for local radio. That is properly a matter that should be left to the BBC within the confines of the overall financial strategy determined by the Government in allocating the licence. I prefer the BBC to be more selective in its functions, and to aspire to more excellence rather than to cover the whole sector. However, I resist the suggestion that that should be anything other than a matter for the BBC to decide.

The BBC has suggested that the licence fee be increased to £65, pegged for three years, to April 1988. I accept that that is, as Alasdair Milne, the BBC's director-general, said in his submission to Members of Parliament, the best bargain in Britain. No doubt it is, but the problem is that we cannot always afford bargains. I wish that we could. The fee may well prove to be a bargain, but at that price it may not be a bargain that we can afford or that the country can afford to pay.

As the BBC says in its thoroughly researched, well-presented submission to the Home Secretary and hon. Members in general, the fee may be good value. Clearly, the annual cost of a licence is good value, using the BBC's basis for the increase — making the licence fee equivalent to the cost of buying a pint of milk or a newspaper a day, or buying 20 cigarettes a week. I do not believe that any hon. Member would dissent from the suggestion that we obtain more impartial information and entertainment in a day from the BBC, in its various forms, than from the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Daily Express*. And the cost is equivalent.

The price suggested by the BBC may be reasonable in terms of what the BBC wants to do and can provide. We must accept that it is a great deal of money for all households, particularly the poor. There may be a case for saying that the BBC should not get all it wants at this time. There needs to be a much more thorough analysis of the proposal for an increase and a far more balanced debate on the BBC's future financing.

The Opposition do not want an erosion of the way in which the BBC is financed and retains its independence, but we should like more time to consider whether it is appropriate to fund the BBC to the extent it requests. We are especially concerned, as some Conservative Members said, about the effect of the increased fee on low income groups, particularly pensioners. At whatever level, the BBC licence represents a high proportion of the income of 7 million pensioner households. I believe that every hon. Member realises that the BBC's proposal has already led to a great deal of controversy and a great outcry from pensioners. I have received their complaints in my mailbag and pensioners have turned up at my surgery to discuss the matter.

Pensioners are extremely anxious and deeply distressed about their ability to raise the money required. Many already find it difficult to find sufficient funds to pay the present licence, without having to go without other necessities. Many pensioners are heavily dependent on television. Many are housebound and inactive, and a considerable proportion are ill. As the BBC points out, pensioners watch 20 per cent. more television than other viewers. Clearly, it is unjust that some pensioners should have to pay a full licence fee when others, who are also pensioners, live through no fault of their own in sheltered housing where they receive a concession and pay no more than a 5p licence fee.

This is a great cause of resentment and bitterness among pensioners. They point out that they will have to pay the new licence fee of £65, while hotels will pay the same fee for 15 sets and a standard fee for every five additional sets. It is clearly wrong, unacceptable and indefensible, as I am sure every Government Member who has participated in this debate would say, for the Savoy to have free television sets in its rooms while pensioners in my constituency—in Stockbridge village, Contril farm and Prescot—on Merseyside generally or anywhere else in the country would have to pay a full fee. That has always been unjust and inequitable, so it is important that I renew and reaffirm the Opposition's commitment to enable all pensioners to have free television licences. One of the first acts of the next Labour Government, if elected after the next general election, will be to ensure that our pensioners no longer have to suffer the anxiety and distress of finding large slices of their income to view what they regard as a social necessity. Instead, they will all be able to watch television relieved of that burden and in the knowledge that they will receive licences free as of right.

The Opposition's aim is to preserve the BBC's integrity and standards and to enhance the quality of life and the incomes of our pensioners. It is also to preserve the BBC's political independence. That clearly is and has been under threat from the Government.

The Prime Minister, not least, has been leading the way in attempting to threaten, cajole, bully and impose pressure on the BBC to influence its choice of programmes and scheduling. The Prime Minister above all should be the guardian of the integrity, impartiality and political independence of our major public service broadcasting corporation. Instead, she has exhibited a narrow-minded

[Mr. Kilroy-Silk]

parochialism and a hostility, manifested also by many of her hon. Friends tonight, towards the BBC, and has attempted overtly to exert pressure on programme makers and schedulers. That is unacceptable, unprecedented and indefensible.

Much worse than that has been the recent disgraceful and inexcusable display of threatening petulance exhibited by the chairman of the Conservative party, the Paymaster General. He, as hon. Members will recall, complained about a "Panorama" programme about the Conservative party and alleged Right-wing infiltration. In *The Times* of 13 February 1984 he is quoted as saying that the "Panorama" programme

"alleged links between Conservative MPs and extreme right wing groups"—

and

"contained smears and innuendoes and used undemocratic techniques."

He went on to say it contained

"outrageous sentiments . . . guilt by association and McCarthyite comment."

He gave a warning that

"very serious action would have to be taken."

That report goes on to refer to the chairman of the Conservative party and the Chief Whip requesting a meeting with the director-general to protest about that programme.

We then had a saga of petulant, hysterical bullying of the BBC and its officials by the chairman of the Conservative party over that programme. He made several substantial allegations which the director-general spent two days going through, every one of which was found not to be substantiated. To this day, those apparent McCarthyite smears, innuendoes and undemocratic techniques have not led to one official complaint from the chairman of the Conservative party, the Chief Whip or any Conservative Member to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. The threat of it was reported in *The Times* of 17 March, but as of 31 March not one complaint had been received by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. There may well have been things wrong with that programme——

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It should be brought to the attention of the House that the programme to which the hon. Gentleman is referring is the subject of legal action. It is inappropriate for the hon. Gentleman to refer to it in this detailed and lengthy way, as it is sub judice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand the position to be that if a date has been set down for legal proceedings the matter is sub judice and should not be referred to. The Chair does not know the exact position of the proceedings. It might be as well if the hon. Member were to avoid referring to cases.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: Like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am well aware of the sub judice rules in the House. As the hon. Gentleman should know, given his legal background, no cases are before the courts at the moment and none are set down; nor have I spoken about any hon. Member who is involved in a case. In any event, when we are talking as we are today about a matter of great public interest, it is proper and appropriate for Parliament to comment properly on the issues while not in any way derogating from the need to comply with the sub judice rule. I think that I have done that. If the hon. Gentleman had paid a little more attention to what I was saying, he would have acknowledged that.

We saw a deliberate, sustained and premeditated campaign to put pressure on the BBC on the content of its political programmes. If there were features of the programme which needed to be complained about, that should have been done through the civil courts, as the hon. Gentleman says is being done, or through the proper complaints procedure of the BBC. A Minister should not, aided and abetted by the Government Chief Whip, have been browbeating the director-general of the BBC. No doubt the Minister threatened that, if proper amends were not made, the BBC's application for a licence fee increase would not receive the same sympathy and consideration that would otherwise have been offered.

It is ironic that all the information for the programme which was the subject of complaint emanated from the young Conservatives. It was the act of a political pipsqueak, as I think the Minister was called. He acted in a petulant, bullying, intimidatory and little-Hitler fashion. It is an example of the threat that the Government pose to the BBC and to standards in public life. It was an offensive and unwarranted smear on the impartiality——

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a debate about the funding of the BBC. Save that the hon. Gentleman is referring in the most indirect and oblique way to the BBC, I submit that his remarks are entirely out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am listening carefully to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk). What he has said so far has not been out of order.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) should be aware that his interventions are taking time from the Minister's reply, which we all want to hear.

As I was saying, the Minister cast an offensive and unwarranted smear on the integrity, political impartiality and independence of the BBC. It was an attempt to intimidate the BBC and to cause it to cower.

We are debating the funding of the BBC and its application for an increase in the licence fee, and thus its funding, in the context of a Government who do not have the best record as a protector of individual civil liberties or of our public services. If the Government can attack democratically elected local authorities, to the great dismay and concern of Conservative Members and of those in another place, if they can attack the long-established democratic rights of voluntary organisations such as trade unions, if they can erode the academic freedom and independence of our universities and other institutions of higher education, and if they can display, as the Prime Minister and the chairman of the Conservative party have, outright prejudice, bias and hostility to the BBC, we must all of us be on our guard against any of their attempts to undermine the financial independence and political integrity of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The Opposition wish to protect the standards of the BBC and its enviable record from the philistinism exhibited on Conservative Benches. We wish to protect the BBC from the greed and avarice that seems to motivate

Conservative Members and retain public service broadcasting and all that it means for standards in Britain in future.

7.34 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the Minister of State have leave to speak again?

Mr. Shaw: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for your timely reminder and for offering me the opportunity to speak again.

I am in a pretty foul temper, having heard an outrageous contribution from the Opposition Front Bench. It was within order, but it was certainly not within courtesy or the practice of the House. The contribution by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk), on a most important issue, more or less boils down to the fact that the Opposition are prepared to offer pensioners free television licences at a cost of £250 million on present bases, thus at a stroke removing about one third of the BBC's total annual income. That was a farcical statement, with no suggestion of where the money is to come from. We learnt just two things—first, that there will be not a penny piece from advertising and, secondly, that there will be no taxation. That is what the hon. Gentleman said. It is, therefore, an outrageous, unwarranted and completely unjustified statement of pseudo-policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) introduced a debate of great importance, and his speech was followed by contributions of the highest standing from Conservative Members. I have to say to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North that it is noticeable that throughout the debate he has had massive support on the Opposition Benches for the issues of the day. His hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has been a considerable attender—I have to grant him that —but I think that he is probably picketing his way into the next debate by obtaining a seat in good time.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hertfordshire, West, for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude), for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), for Southampton, Itchin (Mr. Chope), for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Merchant) for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) offered constructive contributions to the issue of financing the BBC, and, be it noted, most of them were, as I would expect from the Conservative party, reforming and radical contributions contrasted with the total absence of any contribution of a reforming or radical nature from the Labour party, which has so long sought to claim the monopoly on change.

We on Conservative Benches are able to discuss change, progress and the future of our great institutions in a rational and energetic way. That is the profound impression that I trust will be written into the pages of *Hansard* and observed by those outside the confines of the debate who most assuredly will look to what is being discussed here.

Therefore, I thank my hon. Friends for their contributions. I shall make an immediate response on one or two issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling referred to licence evasion and the way in which the courts were handling it. He was right to say that the court system is concerned purely with the fine, not with refunding to the corporation a chunk of the licence fee forgone. As my hon. Friend probably knows, licence evasion entails a maximum fine of £400, but every time someone is brought before the courts, the corporation identifies someone who does not have a licence, so the licence fee will be recovered from the individual. Therefore, there is some recovery of licence income.

My hon. Friend rightly put his finger on the actual amount of evasion that takes place. In the discussion about funding the corporation and the licence fee, my hon. Friends should bear in mind that television is very widespread—97 per cent. of homes have a television receiver, and it is the receiver that constitutes the right to charge for a licence.

About 1·6 million homes are currently not paying the television licence fee, which means that the corporation forgoes—admittedly against its entire efforts—income of about £60 million on licence evasion alone. It may be only 8 per cent. of the homes in question; nevertheless, it represents a significant licence income forgone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North referred several times to the compulsory levy. If that meant that everybody paid, today we might be discussing not a massive increase in the licence fee but a reduction. I make that point in parentheses to comment on the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling, and merely say that there is a very large sum of money around in the licence fee application and that those who do not pay are creating a substantial problem in relation not only to the funding of the corporation but to what other contributors may have to pay to make BBC funding sufficient.

The main issues in the debate clearly revolved round other forms of funding than licence fees. The most prevalent argument was for advertising, although I noted with interest that my hon. Friends' views varied from those who said that it should be limited to television or radio in minutes or by types of programme to those who believed that it should be widespread and completely fund the corporation. Thus, there is a gradation of view as to where the corporation might look if it were seeking advertising revenue.

I note, too, the interesting point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton about sponsorship of programmes, suggesting that there are other forms of contribution from the commercial sector than spot advertising.

In the remaining minutes, my task is to set out the position as I now see it. As my hon. Friends know, the licence fee has existed for about 60 years, originally covering both television and radio. The system has stood the test of time under successive Governments as well as a fair amount of inquiry by various bodies examining the corporation and its funding—the most recent being the Annan report of 1977. But every Government and every inquiry concluded that the licence fee system was the best available means of financing the BBC in such a way as to preserve its independence and to enable it to fulfil its wide-ranging obligations of public service broadcasting. Those obligations are imposed by royal charter, licence and agreement, so any change would involve a major shift not in legislative structure but in the structure on which the corporation is now run.

There is a great variety of view as to whether the output of the corporation on radio or otherwise suits the public taste. Nevertheless, we have to conclude that over a long

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period the licence system has provided a major increase in broadcasting and programme provision and, broadly speaking, a very high level of public acceptability.

Alternatives start with taxation. I am glad that the hon. Member for Knowsley, North made a stand on this and said that no Government of whom he was a member would be involved in direct taxation for corporation funding because that would clearly bring the corporation much further into Government control and influence, almost on an annual basis. I am sure that the whole House is anxious to avoid that. I should say at once that the Government do not regard taxation as a suitable way of replacing the existing system.

Advertising is the most frequently argued solution that would be acceptable. It is argued that a limited injection of advertising revenue would reduce or at least avoid any increase in the present licence fee and at the same time provide the corporation with sufficient funding to compete with ITV on more or less equal terms. It is suggested that the amount of advertising revenue could be stepped up each year, so that the fee could be reduced in real terms and perhaps eventually become just a nominal amount or even disappear altogether. That is certainly a very tempting proposition and it merits close scrutiny.

A further factor would be a view about total advertising revenue and availability and whether that would increase at a sufficient rate to allow the corporation to be funded in that way. Having been involved in these matters from time to time in an earlier career, I must point out that the line between fast and famine in the margarine advertising business is not all that thick. Certainly, there are swings and roundabouts which can operate very quickly indeed. It is by no means certain that advertising revenue will continue to grow at the same rate as in the past 10 years. In fact, ITV revenue this year looks certain to fall short of the £1,000 million forecast for 1984, even though only two or three months ago it seemed likely to reach that figure. As some of my hon. Friends will know, there has been a sharp downturn in revenue in the past two and a half months. ITV is not the only consumer of advertising revenue. Consumption is widely spaced across newspapers and other media.

There would have to be a real reliance upon advertising revenue to supply sufficient funds for the corporation. If advertising were to be introduced into BBC programmes, it would have to be done gradually, with the licence fee revenue remaining the major part of the corporation's income for some time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Has my hon. Friend noticed that the effect of Channel 4 entering the market—although the same arguments were used in that case—has been substantially to reduce the production costs of advertisements, which in some cases represent the bulk of the cost of running an advertising programme? By reducing the price, one can increase the supply.

Mr. Shaw: Yes, I have noticed that there has been little deterrent effect as yet; but my hon. Friend will know that the average viewership of Channel 4 is about 6 per cent. If that percentage were to increase to a level that was seriously competitive with other ITV channels, the question whether it would draw away more costs from the advertising pool would become relevant.

There are problems connected with how advertising could be introduced. At present the licence revenue income, at about £770 million a year, is very substantial. Any replacement for it would have to be of a comparable size and ability to grow. Expenditure in the current financial year—the last of the licence fee settlement—is greater than the licence fee income. The cost to the BBC of providing television and radio services is expected to be about £70 million more than the licence fee income this year. So, with a modest allowance for increased costs in 1984-85, the BBC would probably need £100 million more than the present licence fee produces in order to maintain services at the present level. Such a sum could not be generated by, say, one 15-second advertisement on television each hour. It represents between 10 and 15 per cent. of ITV's total advertising revenue. If, as seems likely, competition between ITV and the BBC for that revenue were to drive down advertising rates—my hon. Friends might wish that to happen, because there has been insufficient competition between ITV companies hitherto—competition would oblige the BBC to take more advertising to bring in the necessary revenue.

Another suggestion is that the BBC might take advertising on only some of its services. Radio 1 is often singled out as a service that would be suitable. The cost of providing Radio 1 is about 2 per cent. of the BBC's total expenditure. The saving on each licence under such an arrangement would be about £1. Advertising on the whole of BBC radio might double that saving, but the area is not of the same order of magnitude as other areas mentioned by my hon. Friends.

I have already considered whether there is enough advertising revenue to fund the BBC. Another consideration is whether viewers would find advertising acceptable. My hon. Friends can point to the rapid and healthy development of ITV, which suggests that advertising has not been a bar to growth. Much of the advertising material produced is of a very high—indeed, almost entertaining—quality. I was somewhat worried when my hon. Friends talked of urging their spouses to put on the kettle in the commercial breaks. That would have a serious effect on audiences.

I am not ruling out advertising for all time as a source or partial source of finance. The BBC's licence agreement has for years recognised the possibility, provided that the Home Secretary agreed. My purpose has been to point out some of the difficult issues that must be faced and to demonstrate that a decision on advertising is neither straightforward nor simple.

Advertising deserves the most careful debate and decision. That is why we have made it clear that the Government do not want any radical departure from the licence fee system for BBC finance at this stage. My hon. Friends have also made their views clear. They want a review of the three-year system and the licence not to be committed for that time so that such a review can take place. I note that that is the message that my hon. Friends want to lay before the House and the Government.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering the BBC's application, so my response is therefore inevitably somewhat delphic. He will take what my hon. Friends have said as an expression of important opinion.

There are other problems. Efficiency has been mentioned. I assure my hon. Friends that, at the request of my right hon. Friend, the corporation has commissioned an independent consultant's report on its efficiency. It will

be completed in January and will be a crucial part of the submission that has now been met. Thus, the view that some of the costs, staffing levels and exigencies in programming that have been incurred should be put under careful scrutiny. That guarantee I can give in the assessment of the current application.

There is no easy solution to the problem of financing. Hon. Members have made it clear that, because the proposed increase is so considerable, the time is right to examine the proposal and the context in which it is put —how to sustain a level of funding which continues to allow the corporation to provide a range of programming which gives value for money by comparison with other media and a high standard of programming which has underpinned the BBC's reputation as one of the finest broadcasting systems in the world.

Maltby Common

7.51 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring to the House the issue concerning the ownership of Maltby far and low common. The Department of the Environment is deciding whether to allow a limitation order to limit access to freedom of air and exercise for commoners in the village, who have enjoyed that right for perhaps 500 years.

The limitation order was introduced by section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925. There was a public inquiry in Maltby from 30 November to 3 December 1982 and I was one of the objectors. I had no idea that I should speak on the outcome of the inquiry as the hon. Member who represents Maltby. Many months later I was selected to fight the Rother Valley constituency, which I am proud to represent.

My stance has not changed. The first planning application to Rotherham metropolitan borough council was made by the Earl of Scarbrough for part of a golf course. The original plan was to use 38.5 acres of the 52.5 acres of Maltby far and low common. It was clear that the application was unlikely to be accepted as the site is one of special scientific interest and has been designated by a Yorkshire naturalists' trust as one where no buildings can be erected and to which people do not have the right of air and exercise, as would be normal on common land. The revised plan on which the inquiry was held proposed that 16.5 acres be taken from Malby far and low common to complete a golf course to be run by Sandbeck Golf and Country Club Ltd., a private company composed of a few business men. The idea was that the Earl of Scarbrough should use parts of Maltby common to complete an 18-hole golf course.

Another golf course is needed in my constituency. I earnestly hope that one will be built in that area, as it would provide a facility for my constituents and people in surrounding constituencies. But I object to the idea that the Earl of Scarbrough should take 16·5 acres from Maltby common to complete his golf course, when he has right of access to between 2,000 to 3,000 acres of land which he owns. The 20,000 inhabitants of Maltby have the right to use 114 acres in total for air and exercise, and even that amount is restricted because some of it comprises sports grounds owned by collieries and local authorities.

Although the limitation order affects only two commons, Maltby common is one of four and comprises about 76 acres. For that reason, 16·5 acres of this land should not be handed over to Sandbeck Golf and Country Club Ltd., by the Earl of Scarbrough and taken away from the people of Maltby.

I have sought this debate to discuss the specific question of ownership. I do not intend to go into detail about the limitation order, or into the many aspects of the report of the inspector, a solicitor appointed by the Department of the Environment to carry out the public inquiry. However, some aspects are important. The public inquiry was originally held in Maltby civic centre, but within minutes it was realised that the room could not hold the number of people wishing to attend. As a result, it was suspended for several hours and re-opened in the Methodist church hall, which could hold a sizeable audience.

The question of ownership was raised early in the proceedings and, indeed, had been raised publicly on

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

numerous occasions. The issue was whether the Earl of Scarbrough owned Maltby far and low commons. He claimed ownership on the basis that they were manorial wastelands, and that as lord of the manor of Maltby he owned them.

At that time, the inquiry inspector accepted that claim, and in paragraph 152 of his report he talked about specific evidence to show whether the Earl of Scarbrough was the owner. He commented on the tithe commutation agreement of 1839, and said there was some doubt about who was the lord of the manor when an Earl Fitzwilliam had signed the tithe commutation agreement. He said he could not believe that if it was incorrect that the Earl of Scarbrough was lord of the manor.

"it would not have been challenged immediately by the rightful Lord, whoever he might be".

Straight away the inspector jumped to an assumption that, because there was a common land order, and because a noble lord who was a big landowner lived nearby, any land had to have a rightful owner. I submit that that is not necessarily so. It does not mean that anybody has to be the lord of Maltby far and low common or the lord of the manor of Maltby.

The lord of the manor system is based upon feudal law. The feudal system was introduced into this country by Duke William of Normandy, following the invasion and conquest of England. The manor was the basic unit of local government and administration, not land ownership. It is necessary to stress this point as the Norman earls were great land thieves. Their propensity for theft and squabbling over land has continued to this day.

In return for their services the earls were granted manors and other portions of lands by Duke William. Subject to swearing fealty to the Crown and leaving a sufficiency for others, who could be either free people or various kinds of serfs, the remainder of the profits which could be accrued from the land and administration of the manor would be enjoyed by the lords of the manors which they respectively held.

But the lords never actually owned the land. They just held it and enjoyed the profits so long as they lived. If, in turn, the lords of the manors allowed somebody to occupy land, this was only for the duration of the feoffee's life. If on death they wished to pass on their tenancy to somebody else they had to hand back the land to the lord of the manor and pay a fine for the privilege of so doing. The person who wished to take over the tenancy could do so only by payment of a fine to the lord of the manor. Subject to swearing fealty, and so on, this transference of tenancy was not by right but only by the will and acceptance of the lord of the manor.

Similarly, the lord of the manor held the manor only during his lifetime. On death, the manor reverted to the Crown. Only by swearing fealty, and so on, were the manors then bestowed on their heir or assign. In other words, death always terminated both individual tenancies and lordships. This was known as the law of mortmain.

The history of Maltby manor goes back to those days. It was one of 233 manors that were allotted by William I to Roger de Builli. It was called the Great Fee. The manors originally held by de Builli were administered as one large estate, called an honour, this being the honour of Blyth. The separate manor of Blyth was given to a religious order. A castle was built in the village of Tickhill. The administration of the honour of Blyth was handed over to the castle in Tickhill. It then became the honour of Tickhill.

The direct line of Roger de Builli died out. After much bickering, claim and counterclaim and a few acts of revolt against the Crown, the honour of Tickhill became settled with Alice, Countess of Eu who was based on London, Cambridge and her French estates. The castle and honour of Tickhill was sub-infeudated—that is, managed for her by appointed representatives. The sub-infeudatories in turn appointed fee farmer agents to manage various of the individual manors. The Countess of Eu sub-infeudated to the de Viponts. Alice de Vipont gave Sandbeck to the monastery at Roche, which is in my constituency. As my story unfolds it will be important to remember that there was a manor of Sandbeck and a manor of Roche. They were separate from the manor of Maltby. This may have led to great confusion in the past. The Countess of Eu confirmed the grant because all that Idonea de Vipont could grant was the profit she would make as a sub-infeudatory. In turn, the Crown had to confirm the grant by Alice of Eu, which confirmed the grant by Idonea de Vipont. This is how the feudal system worked.

Eventually Alice, Countess of Eu was told, as were all other people who owned land in England and France, "You hold land in England or France, but not in both." Alice, Countess of Eu, opted for France and from that day the Great Fee of de Builli reverted to the Crown and became part of the Duchy of Lancaster. All the old records are filed in the public records office under the title "Duchy of Lancaster papers".

The Earl of Cumberland and others like him were simply sub-infeudatories under the Duchy. In 1837, when the Earl Fitzwilliam agreed to the enclosure of the open field of Maltby, he did so as the sub-infeudatory of the duchy of that part of the original de Builli fee situated in and around, and administered from, the honour and castle of Tickhill.

If the Earl Fitzwilliam or anyone who succeeded him as sub-feudatory holder of the honour and castle of Tickhill had parted with the separate manor of Maltby, the holder of the manor of Maltby—what remained after the grants to the church—would be only a sub-infeudatory of a sub-infeudatory—in other words, a fee farmer to a greater fee farmer who held the lands of the duchy, as of the Crown. The statute in relation to that was one of Quia Emptores in 1289 and it is implicit in that statute that sub-infeudation means that the lordship of any manor does not make sub-infeudatories of the lords. They simply remain tenants. That statute is still used in land conveyancing. The lordship could not have been handed down.

The Earl of Scarbrough married in about 1725 into the family of the Earl of Castleton, which owned more land in that area and in Lincolnshire. A book called "The History of South Yorkshire" by the Rev. Joseph Hunter was printed in 1828. It covered all the lands and manors of South Yorkshire. On page 273 it is shown clearly that at the time of the death of the second Viscount Castleton on 13 November 1640 an abstract was taken of the inquisition after his death. I assume that that covers what land he held.

The list included the manor of Sandbeck:

"besides his lands in Lincolnshire, he had The manor of Sandbeck."

That is an important fact, because the abstract adds:

"The manor of Maltby, held of the king as of the castle of Tickhill."

The manor of Austerfield, which is quite nearby, was another of the manors handed to the honour of Tickhill and was held under the king as of the manor of East Greenwich, and the manor of Slade Houton, which is also close by and is part of the ecclesiastical manor of Maltby and is in my constituency, was also "held of the king".

It seems that when the Earl of Scarbrough married into the family of the Earl of Castleton he was perhaps the lord of the manor of Sandbeck, because that was not held as of the castle of Tickhill and was not held by what we now call the Duchy of Lancaster. There may have been great doubts about who was lord of the manor of Maltby—if there was a lord of the manor. It seems that the lordship of the manor was held by the Crown and could not, therefore, have been passed down through generations of a family.

The tithe commutation agreement in 1841 provided that people had to pay money to the parish if they were on the land and were growing crops and so on.

The tithe was about one tenth of what was produced, and it was paid to the local church. The tithe apportionment agreement for Maltby showed that the owner of Maltby's far and low commons and of Woodlee common and Stonegreen was Maltby township. As it happened, none of the commons was being used for any agricultural purpose. No commoners were growing crops on them as far as I can discover. Consequently no tithes had to be paid to the church.

But it is an important fact that the tithe commutation agreement in 1841 said, in effect, that the owner was Maltby township. It would seem that that was never challenged by the then Earl of Scarbrough. Another important point involves the Commons Act 1876. I have not seen the statute, but I understand that that Act had to be signed by all landowners in the area, and in the presence of the lord of the manor. At that time, the Earl FitzWilliam was adjudged to be the lord of the manor. That does not appear in any title deed, but he was adjudged to be the lord of the manor, and was present for the signing. Many people have said that it really does not matter, because the open fields enclosure and the tithe commutation provisions are not proof of evidence and are not title deeds. In the last century the Earl of Scarbrough's family twice applied to Parliament to enclose Maltby far and Maltby low commons. Objections were made. At the public inquiry it was said that those objections involved the ownership of Maltby far and low commons. I have been through the records with regard to both of those agreements. The 1879 one went to a Select Committee, where evidence was taken. I have read through the Select Committee's report, and there is nothing in the record to say that the enclosure legislation went through Parliament—despite the fact that two applications were made — because of the question of ownership.

The only thing that I could find with regard to the 1879 inquiry was that when the enclosure commissioners held two public meetings in the village of Maltby, a man said that the commoners did indeed own the commons. At that time, for a man to turn to the lord of the manor—albeit perhaps not the lord of the manor of Maltby—and to say that he objected to his claim to have the ownership and rights of common land in the area, would have been a big and brave thing for someone to do. I do not know whether that would still be the case in 1984.

Evidence was given to the Select Committee on the 1879 enclosure by the master cutler of Sheffield, the lord mayor of Sheffield and by the lord mayor of Rotherham. The area is very beautiful, and was then too. It is visited, and was then. People left the industrial towns of, for example, Sheffield and Rotherham and went to Woodlee common, Stonegreen and Maltby far and low commons for their holidays. Maltby village was known as a beauty spot and many people, even at the beginning of the century, used to go on holiday there. They would go on to the far and low commons and use them for exercise, while having rights as adjudged commoners. That will be restricted if the limitation order goes through now.

What is interesting about the 1879 evidence was that the people in Sheffield, and, I believe, the master cutler, said that there were only two commons where they could go where they had rights of air and exercise without trespass. One was Lindrick common, which is just in north Nottinghamshire, not far from Maltby common. The other was Maltby common.

We have now lost Lindrick common to a golf course, although I do not know exactly when. But if the mayor of Sheffield were giving evidence again now, I am sure that he would say that whereas they once had two commons, they now have only one.

There has been a massive population expansion in Maltby alone, which is known as no more than a township. Over 20,000 people live there. They have the right at present to walk on all areas, certainly of Maltby far common and on areas of Maltby low common, except for the site of special scientific interest in the charge of the Yorkshire Naturalist Trust because of its beauty. In those circumstances, I am sure that with commons commissioners today we could have had an interesting re-run of the decision on the enclosure in 1879.

Let me move on into this century. In 1919 the Finance Act was based in reality on an interesting form of land tax. It was stopped in another place, so no tax was ever levied on anybody. The district valuers had to go round all the land to find out who was the owner, to see whether they were in a position to pay a land tax as owner.

In the district valuer's report of 1915 the ownership of Maltby far and low commons was registered as being Maltby township. There is something strange, because on two occasions, in 1841 and again in 1915, when it was likely that some payments would have to to be made under contemporary Acts if one were the owner of the land, the Earl of Scarbrough or his predecessors sat back and were quite prepared to see the land in the hands of Maltby township.

I do not want to read too much into that, only to say that, as many hon. Members know, I was a coal miner at Maltby colliery before I came to the House. I have an avid interest in local history. I am a founder member of Maltby local history society. I happened to get hold of the royalties map for the Maltby main colliery company. I looked at it to see who claimed the ownership of Maltby far and low common at that time because when the colliery company mined under any land royalties were paid to the landowner. Lo and behold, on the royalties map, Earl Scarbrough's name appears in big letters all over the place, and on the two tiny patches of Maltby far and low commons is the Earl of Scarbrough's name again. Of course, he would wish to be owner of Maltby far and low commons because the Maltby miners were mining coal there and his family accrued quite a few pounds as a result.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

I do not think for one minute that that was a massive percentage of the coal royalties paid to his family, because it was obviously a small plot of land when one looks round at the thousands of acres that Lord Scarbrough owned. It seems to smack of the fact that in 1915 the township of Maltby may have had to pay rent on the land while Lord Scarbrough was claiming coal royalties from mining it.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I know that the area is attractive. Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe" begins by describing it as:

"That pleasant part of England where flows the river Don."

Was Maltby an urban district, and I am right in thinking that there was right of access to the common under the 1926 legislation?

Mr. Barron: Yes, there was a Maltby urban district. For some strange reason many public records of crucial times for the question of ownership have gone astray. We continue to look for them.

I turn to section 156 of the inspector's report. Mr. Ferris, QC, was acting on behalf of the Rotherham metropolitan borough council. At the time of the inquiry the inspector seemed to be satisfied with the question of ownership. At that time many people did not know what was going on. Advice was taken from the QC who represented the Earl of Scarbrough and accepted, without the consideration of evidence that the protesters had, at the meeting.

At present Rotherham metropolitan borough council is consulting with the solicitors, J. J. Pearlman in Leeds, who represented objectors at the public inquiry. They are investigating the legal aspects of the ownership of Maltby far and low common. A prominent member of Rotherham metropolitan district council said publicly that it would seek to finalise the question of ownership of Maltby far and low common, even if it meant going to court. Perhaps because it was said at the public inquiry that the courts must decide the question of ownership, not the inquiry, that may be the case.

In section 157 the inspector states:

"I do not consider there is an onus on the applicant to produce his deeds to enable objectors to endeavour to find planks on which to build a case in opposition."

If the Earl of Scarbrough has the title deeds of the land, the question of ownership could be settled quickly, amicably, without public delay or any more ado from the inquiry. There would be no more letters written saying that if he was not or is not the owner of Maltby far and low commons he should not have applied for the limitation order. If he showed the title deeds to those who say that he does not own them, the matter could be settled. If he finds trouble about doing that because of personal remarks made about him in connection with the ownership of the land, I shall go to his estate or to his representative in London to see the title deeds. I shall then pass on the evidence to those who still question whether he owns the land.

I tabled parliamentary questions about the matter during the past two months. The first was to the Department of the Environment on 22 November. I asked the Secretary of State,

"what evidence he obtained, prior to the public inquiry in 1982 concerning Maltby common, to satisfy him on the ownership question."

I received this definite answer:

"The evidence consisted of various documents including title deeds, and the opinion of Mr. Francis Ferris, QC, which was obtained by Rotherham metropolitan borough council." —[*Official Report*, 22 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *281*.]

On 3 December I asked another question, although there were many more in between. I asked the Secretary of State,

"if the deeds he saw from Messrs. Allen and Overy, solicitors in relation to Maltby common, were a deed of title to the specific ownership of Maltby far and low common."

Following the definite statement that the evidence had included title deeds, I got a very different answer on 3 December:

"There was more than one deed and other documentation, examination of which satisfied my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the title to Maltby commons could be traced to the Earl of Scarbrough." — [*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. *63*.]

That is a little different from saying that title deeds had been seen. That highlights the vagueness of the question of ownership. If it was not vague before, it has certainly become vague after those answers from the Department of the Environment.

The limitation order that will be put on the commons is the first, if my information is correct, since 1925 for a golf course on public land. That was when the legislation was introduced. Indeed, I do not believe that a golf course has been put on common land this century. The decision will set a precedent for common land and people's rights to take air and exercise there.

Maltby common is used by Maltby people. I used it as a boy. However, in some ways it has been abused. A tenant farmer of the Earl of Scarbrough used parts of Maltby far common under the agriculture legislation that was passed during the war in the "Dig for Victory" campaign. In the 1960s the local council had a long fight to remove the tenant farmer from the common. Indeed, I remember working on that farm as a young lad. I was employed as a casual labourer to pick up stones from the land. We were filling wagons with stones, and then going to the other side of Maltby common and dumping them there. I now recognise that it is a beautiful area with much flora and fauna that is of great value to naturalists. I was not a naturalist then. I was paid by the tenant farmer to dump stones on Maltby far common.

At the public inquiry we heard that it would be a good idea to use that part of the common because it had become an eyesore. The Earl of Scarbrough should know all about that, because besides the fact that I was paid to dump stones at weekends and during the school holidays, it is well known in my area that the building company owned by the Earl of Scarbrough has been caught dumping on Maltby far common. The county council ordered the company to clear what it had been dumping, which was waste material from houses.

The question of ownership of Maltby far and low common must be resolved. If the Department makes a decision with such uncertainty still in the air, the issue will drag on for years. We must resolve it now. No doubt the Earl of Scarbrough will read this debate in *Hansard* tomorrow. A couplet has been made up by the people who have been trying to keep Maltby common for Maltby people, which is an honourable objective. It goes like this:

"The law locks up the man or woman,
Who steals the goose from off the common,
But lets the greater villain loose,
Who steals the common from the goose."

Is that true in the case of the Maltby far and low commons? It was quoted at public meetings last century concerning Maltby far and low commons. The Earl of Scarbrough is the owner because he claims that it is manorial waste land and he is the lord of the manor of Maltby, but I would like to know the truth, and I should like the Department of the Environment to know as well. At the end of the day, this proposal will take up 16·5 acres of common land that Maltby people have had the right to walk on for hundreds of years.

8.30 am

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I pay tribute to the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has presented his case, and for the diligent way in which he has collected the facts on this important matter. I declare an interest as chairman of the Open Spaces Society, which started in 1865. One of our earliest cases concerned Maltby common, and we were fighting against enclosures in the 19th century.

Therefore, we are greatly concerned about the latest limitation order. The Opposition would officially fully support the representations made by my hon. Friend. This land has belonged to the ordinary people of the Maltby district for generations. It looks as though it will be stolen from them, although it may be done legally. I urge the Minister on two points. First, if the Earl of Scarbrough, or anybody else wants an adjudication, but will not accept my hon. Friend, I am happy to offer the good offices of the Open Spaces Society, and I know that my hon. Friend would accept them.

Secondly, will the Minister give the House an assurance that no final decision will be taken on the limitation order until the ordinary people of Maltby have the right to continue their legal inquiries, that the case will be fought fairly, and when it is decided it will be in the light of proven evidence and not on the hearsay of a noble lord?

8.32 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): I join the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) in congratulating the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) on the way in which he presented his case. It was a fascinating tour de force of local history, which will be read with great interest by those who are interested in the area. I congratulate him on the way that he presented a complex and interesting case. It reminds us what a privilege it is to live in a country that has been so free from foreign invasion that we can argue about ownership going back to the 11th or 12th century, with some hope of finding records and unbroken continuity.

In cases such as this, I begin to feel that this is real politics. It was for matters such as this that hon. Members from both sides of the House went into politics. These are real matters that affect the people, and on which careful judgment has to be made. One has to think of tests by which one can measure these matters, and I can think of no better assessment than that of a great hon. Member, who sat for one of the university seats, which have been, perhaps sadly, abolished, although I believe that there is still a Conservative manifesto pledge in 1951 to re-establish them. We have not got around to doing that yet. That was Mr. A. P. Herbert, and one wonders what his view of a case such as this would be. When I come to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his decision, I shall have Mr. A. P. Herbert looking over my shoulder to see that we make a decision that is commonsense and takes into account the traditions of the country.

I should like to put on the record a few points, most of which confirm the account of the procedures given by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. Perhaps it will be helpful if I give our understanding of what is happening. We shall carefully consider the hon. Gentleman's points, and any other relevant evidence that is offered, before making a final decision.

As the hon. Member for Rother Valley said, section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925 gave the public a legal right of access to areas of common land for air and exercise by virtue of their location in an urban district on 1 January 1926. My Department has been involved in this matter for a number of years, and I hope that that will assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not rushing into a premature decision. As he rightly said, Lord Scarbrough applied for an order to impose limitations and conditions as to rights of public access to parts of both commons.

Subsection (1) of section 193 of the 1925 Act provides:

"The Minister shall, on the application of any person entitled as lord of the manor or otherwise to the soil of the land, or entitled to any commonable rights affecting the land, impose such limitations on and conditions as to the exercise of the rights of access or as to the extent of the land to be affected as, in the opinion of the Minister, are necessary or desirable for preventing any estate, right or interest of a profitable or beneficial nature in, over, or affecting the land from being injuriously affected".

Such an application was made by Lord Scarbrough to enable part of the commons, as we have been told, together with other land which was not common, to be used as a golf course. The wording of the proposed limitations was provisionally agreed, in accordance with the Department's normal practice.

The first occasion when the ownership of these commons was called into question, in connection with this application—although there may have been a history of cases — was following public notice of the proposed order. A number of objections were received and one ground of objection put forward by some of the objectors was that my noble Friend was not the owner of the commons and therefore not entitled to apply for an order under section 193.

The applicant for the order was given the opportunity to comment on all the objections, and various documents, including copies of title deeds, were provided by the applicant's solicitors to my Department.

The Rotherham metropolitan borough council objected to the proposed order, but not on ownership grounds. The borough council investigated the ownership question because of assertions that the council and not my noble Friend was the true owner of the commons. They sought counsel's opinion on this issue from Mr. Ferris. Having considered all the evidence, counsel concluded that the real evidence of title appeared to be all one way, in favour of the Earl.

This opinion was made available to my Department, and I have read it carefully. My legal advisers studied all the evidence of title which had been put forward by the applicant and Mr. Ferris' opinion, and concluded that my noble Friend Lord Scarbrough was the owner of the commons and had the status to make the application for the order. Subsequently, it was decided that a non-statutory public inquiry should be held to assist in

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

determination of the application for the order, but that this should not extend to the ownership question, as the Secretary of State was satisfied on this issue.

However, inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State have considerable discretion in their conduct of inquiries. When, at the opening of the inquiry, several of the objectors challenged the Secretary of State's ruling that the applicant was the owner of the commons, the inspector responded that he was prepared to hear legal submissions as to whether the Secretary of State had jurisdiction to make the order, but he stated that the inquiry could not be a forum for a detailed conveyancers' investigation of the title, as the hon. Member for Rother Valley said. The inspector also pointed out that only the courts could determine conclusively any question of title to land. The Queen's counsel representing the applicant at the inquiry indicated that he was not prepared to disclose details of the applicant's title, and the inspector ruled that the objectors were not entitled as of right to the title documents.

The inspector allowed the various parties to make their submissions on the ownership issue. These are set out in the inspector's report, to which the hon. Member for Rother Valley referred, and based on the evidence presented to him, the inspector reached the same conclusion as that previously reached by the Secretary of State — that the applicant was lord of the manor of Maltby and had the status to make the application.

After consideration of the inspector's report, the Secretary of State was disposed to accept the inspector's recommendation, which was to the effect that the order should be made reducing the area over which the limitations should apply and the number of limitations. However, it was decided that the applicant and the objectors should be allowed the opportunity to make representations about the proposed modifications, before the Secretary of State reached a firm decision. The respondents were originally given 21 days in which to respond, but in response to requests from several objectors, including Rotherham borough council, two extensions have been granted, and the new deadline is 15 January 1985.

Although representations have only been invited from objectors to the proposed modifications to the order, we have already received representations about the ownership issue, and have heard the hon. Gentleman's speech, and consideration will be given to all such representations. I shall pay close attention to all the arguments put forward by the hon. Gentleman. I shall need to study them and obtain legal advice about them. I shall take everything fully into account.

There has been pressure by objectors and by the hon. Member for copies of the ownership documentation which were supplied to the Department by the solicitors acting for my noble Friend to be made available. The trouble is that these documents are not ours and it is not for the Secretary of State to disclose them.

I must emphasise the distinction between the Secretary of State's duty and a court, if the matter came before a court. The Secretary of State's duty is to reach a reasonable decision. He must not lay himself open to legal challenge by taking a decision against the principles laid down in the Wednesbury rules. He cannot make a final legal judgment in the way that the court could. We have taken an unusual amount of trouble in this case to try to check the ownership, because questions were asked about it.

Dr. David Clark: This is an important point. Is the Minister saying that, if his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State makes a limitation order and there is then a legal challenge, the "common" people could continue to have their right of access pending the court's decision?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall have to go carefully here, and perhaps write to the hon. Gentleman after legal advice on the matter. It would be wrong of me to say, off the cuff, that we would wait indefinitely for a potential court challenge, because one might never come.

If a court challenge were mounted, it would be a serious matter, which the Department would wish to take into account. It would be wrong for me to try to settle that matter from the Dispatch Box now. I shall take further advice on it.

The Secretary of State must beware of legal challenge from either side. If he were to make an unreasonable judgment on the evidence before him he would be open to legal challenge. We must reach our decision on the basis of the evidence available to us. We are, as the House can see, taking considerable care to ensure that we do that.

If objectors wish to pursue strict proof of title, that must ultimately be done in court. The expertise of the hon. Member for South Shields is well known. We shall pay close attention to what he and the hon. Member for Rother Valley have said. We shall take further advice about the implications of any court case. I should be grateful to the hon. Member for Rother Valley if he would kindly keep the Department informed about any such developments, because they would plainly be relevant to any decision we make.

Dairy Industry (South-West Wales)

8.45 am

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): In the few minutes that we have at our disposal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to say that the farmers of south-west Wales—many of them small and some not so small—are facing a rather bleak Christmas. Milk quotas were introduced nine months ago and, unfortunately, confusion still reigns in the minds of so many in the farming community about their future. It is a community which I and the Secretary of State represent. We have been awaiting information about the hardship cases and the secondary quotas for a long time. Many of the farmers of south-west Wales are looking ahead three months to the negotiations for 1985-86 instead of looking back nine months.

I am sure that the small village of Llangadog is indelibly fixed in the mind of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It was the scene of an example of militancy among the farming community to which we are not accustomed. That militancy stemmed from frustration and the fact that the milk quotas had been introduced like a bolt from the blue. They represented a U-turn for the agriculture policy of all Governments who have held office since the war. Many of us look back to the publication of the White Paper, "Food from Our Own Resources". Until March, farmers were being urged to expand. The request was made to such an extent that in the past year milk production in Wales increased by 17 per cent. That was not far short of the expansion that took place in Northern Ireland. However, the additional quota in Northern Ireland amounted to almost double the quota that was to be made available to Welsh farmers.

We in Wales are concerned about the small farm with 40 cows or more, but not in isolation; our concern extends to all farms. The farmers have been somewhat reassured by an announcement by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that farms with an annual production of 200,000 litres of milk will be looked after by redistribution, but they represent only about half of the farms in south-west Wales. There are many farmers with 40 cows and upwards who are waiting anxiously to learn whether the outgoers scheme can be extended to them. If the scheme is to be successful, additional money will have to be made available. There should be some arrangement whereby farms, whatever their size, are able to surrender, in part, their milk production.

Given the confusion that has developed over the past nine months, it appears that the farmers of south-west Wales and the entire agricultural community are worried. We are worried about the future of our creameries. Due to the especially dry summer and winter, milk production in south-west Wales has fallen to the extent that some of our creameries are not getting sufficient supplies. However, farmers' wives are discovering that massive Irish product importations are now to be seen in our shops. Our farms are subject to a 9 per cent. cut in quota, but during the negotiations which took place last March the Irish Republic was allowed a 5 per cent. increase in quota. For the farmers of south-west Wales, this has been a raw deal and an unfair state of affairs.

We are anxiously awaiting what the Minister has to say. Above all, the message from the farmers of south-west Wales is that, when the negotiations take place in March next year, we must put forward a case, preferably through the personal intervention of the Minister, for an additional quota for the farmers of Wales, particularly south-west Wales. If we can get that additional quota, people's fears will be eased; they will know what their future is.

At the moment, in our colleges of agriculture in south-west Wales there is a considerable drop in the number of students. Why has that significant drop taken place? The reason is that farmers cannot afford to send their sons to the colleges of agriculture. If farming is to develop in south-west Wales, it is essential that the know-how and expertise is handed down from one generation to the next.

Therefore, we should look, not back at nine months of confusion, when people have hardly known what tomorrow would bring, but forward to the negotiations that are to take place in Brussels in the early spring. If Wales does not have a better deal for the year to come, many Welsh farmers will be unable to carry on.

The truth is that the farmers of Wales cannot diversify. Farmers are committed to dairy farming. The climate and topography is such that they can carry on only that type of dairy farming. Indeed, it galls the people of south-west Wales when they watch a Sunday afternoon television programme and see farmers from East Anglia—the corn farmers—telling the farmers of south-west Wales that, as a result of the imposition of quotas, they over-reacted. I challenge the farmers in those lucrative arable areas of England to come to south-west Wales, for there they will see real hardship.

We hope that the Minister will give us a ray of optimism. We know of his connections with my part of south-west Wales and the respect that the people have for him there. We anxiously await words of optimism, because, after nine months of darkness and pessimism, the farmers in that area are surely worthy of such optimism.

8.52 am

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Mr. John Stradling Thomas): I welcome the opportunity of this late—or early—hour to reply to the debate. In his closing words, the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) referred to my connections with the part of Wales that he represents. I am delighted to see present my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who also represents a similar constituency that is greatly involved in the difficulties that I freely admit the dairy industry has been passing through recently. It is still affected, as the hon. Gentleman said, by the upheaval of quotas, and he stressed that the uncertainty has caused a great deal of worry.

The uncertainty and the difficulties are due not only to the introduction of quotas but to the effects of the long, dry summer. As a result, milk production in south and west Wales has suffered an unexpectedly large reduction. However, that is not a pattern that I expect to continue. I greatly sympathise with all producers throughout the United Kingdom, not only in south-west Wales, who have been badly affected by those events, especially those who have no alternative to milk and little scope to adapt their dairy enterprises to a lower level of production.

I also fully appreciate the concern that has been expressed about the difficulties arising from the new arrangements, but I believe that the quota system does represent a significant step, in combination with price restraint, towards containing the Community surplus, which, even with the introduction of quotas, is expected to cost over £2·4 billion this year.

[Mr. John Stradling Thomas]

I am sure that after the inevitable period of uncertainty and adjustment, dairy farmers will be better placed to take the necessary decisions on long-term planning and future investment and that the industry as a whole will be more stable and better placed to respond to market demands.

The Government have taken positive steps to ameliorate the effect of quotas on those most harshly affected. The one-year phasing in has reduced the immediate impact, but we foresaw that there would be particular difficulties for certain areas, such as Wales, where production increased sharply between 1981 and 1983. That is why we held back a quota reserve of 2·5 per cent. to assist not just the special cases provided for in the regulations but those producers who were carrying out development plans.

Some 4,700 Welsh producers applied for special case treatment. I must take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the chairman and members of the local panel of the Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal for England and Wales for their invaluable work in processing those applications.

The Government are also making available £50 million over five years under the outgoers scheme, which is designed to help both those wishing to leave and those wishing to stay in milk production. Those leaving will receive compensation and the quotas surrendered will be re-allocated to those wishing to stay, giving priority to those who produced less than 200,000 litres in 1983 and providing an additional quota for those awarded an increase by the Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal for England and Wales in respect of exceptional hardship applications.

I am sure that that is the best way to help small producers, who represent more than half the total number of producers in south-west Wales. In addition, the aid to small milk producers scheme is being continued and a lump sum payment of £209·20 will be made to all producers who delivered not more than 200,000 litres of milk to the Milk Marketing Board in the 1983 calendar year and were still delivering milk in August or September 1984.

Last, but by no means least, farmers within the area added to the less favoured area whose incomes are below comparable incomes have been able to obtain higher rates of grant under the capital grant schemes on work commenced after 28 February 1984. Eligible works are the same as those which previously attracted the higher rate in the original less favoured areas—except for roads, bridges and similar items which retain the standard rates. A wide variety of investments in the new less favoured areas, including sheep pens, drainage and grassland improvements, now qualify for the higher rate.

In addition, all those in the extended less favoured areas will, if they occupy at least 3 hectares of eligible land, be able to qualify for compensatory allowances from 1 January 1985. The allowances are paid on breeding ewes and cows but not on dairy cows, although dairy farmers who run a separate livestock enterprise can benefit from allowances on the sheep and beef cows.

I should add that farmers in the less favoured areas pay a reduced rate of co-responsibility levy on milk deliveries to the dairies of up to 60,000 kg. The actual rates of compensatory allowance were announced recently and will, I am sure, benefit many dairy producers in the extended area.

The agreement reached on 31 March 1984 cannot be altered, and future allocations from the Community contingency reserve will be negotiated at the 1985-86 CAP price-fixing talks. The Commission's proposals have yet to be published, and it would clearly be necessary to look at the proposals on milk not only in their own right but as part of the complete package as it affects the United Kingdom. That being so, we shall have to decide upon priorities, once we have had a chance to study the price proposals in the light of the United Kingdom's negotiating objectives as a whole, not only on agriculture but on any wider budgetary considerations.

Even at the reduced levels of quotas which are already laid down for 1985-86——

It being Nine o'clock am on Thursday, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

9 am

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I beg leave to present three petitions collected by residents of the constituency of Stockport. They are all in identical terms. They affirm the petitioners' belief that the newly fertilised human embryro is a real, living, individual human being. I share that belief. They all oppose all practices that discriminate against the embryo or violate his human dignity and right to life. I share that opposition.

The petitions continue as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

9.1 am

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I beg to ask leave to present three petitions on the protection of the human embryo, signed by nearly 1,000 petitioners living in, or being fortunately close to, my constituency of Yardley. The petitions are in the names of Mr. C. H. Greenhalgh of 35 Kathleen road, Yardley, Birmingham, Janet M. Felton of 17 Forest road, Yardley, L. Benbow of 14 Harnall Croft, Sheldon, Birmingham and Gail Aucott of 16 Broad road, Acocks Green, Birmingham.

The petitioners refer to and endorse the statement in the Warnock report that

"the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation".

I concur with that view. My constituents pray

that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

I join many hon. Members in hoping that such legislation will be brought before the House this Session, and that I shall be able to sponsor and support it.

To lie upon the Table.

9.3 am

Mr. Tom Sackville (Bolton, West): I beg to ask leave to present a petition in the name of Mr. Andrew Blackwood of Bolton Life group, 28 Brentford avenue, Bolton and signed by 2,200 residents of Bolton, West. The petition affirms that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living, individual human being. It continues:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research and experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Glasgow Health Board (Housing)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

9.4 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I thank the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland for his presence. He will appreciate that, as we conclude our all-night sitting, workers at Woodilee and Stoneyetts will have just finished their night shift. I am sure that we all anxious about the fact that they will be returning to housing conditions which fall far short of the type of environment that we want for people who do so much for the Health Service in my constituency.

The Minister is aware of the history of the problem. There are 100 houses in Woodilee and Stoneyetts. The campaign for the improvement of those houses began some time ago, and it is essential bearing in mind the appalling conditions in which some of my constituents have to live. The Minister was kind enough to afford me a meeting in St. Andrew's house on 1 June. We discussed the problems. Following that meeting—I was delighted with the Minister's response—he announced that an extra £6 million would be made available to the Greater Glasgow health board for the maintenance and improvement of those properties and that £250,000 of it would be allocated to Woodilee and Stoneyetts. The Minister also assured me that he would monitor the matter.

I have called for this debate because I should like to see what evidence there is of the Minister acting in that way. Monitoring is essential if we are to achieve what we want to achieve. When I met representatives of the health board on 1 November, they were not able to assure me that a start had been made. Indeed, the tenders had not been issued. I am sure that the Minister was greatly disappointed at that, in view of the additional allocation that he made. I am sure that, like me, the Minister has an eye on the financial year. I was disappointed to learn this week that, although the contractors have made a superficial appearance, there is no evidence that any real work has been done. I fear for the loss of the £250,000, which is welcome, although it is not an enormous sum. I am much more worried that, if the health board does not spend the money that is available in this financial year, it will be much more difficult for the Minister to endorse the rolling programme, in spite of his good intentions.

It is not enough to say that I am worried about the condition of the houses. I therefore invite the Minister to visit my constituency to see Woodilee and Stoneyetts for himself. If he did that it would be part of the monitoring process, and we might then make the type of progress that has not been made, although I think that the Minister wanted to make progress on 1 June. Even before he arrives, I would like him to send a surveyor so that he can be given professional advice on existing structural conditions. I hope that the Minister will come to Woodilee and Stoneyetts in due course, and I hope that it will not be too long before he does so.

The Minister is aware that I am referring to two old psychiatric hospitals. In Woodilee there are between 900 and 1,000 beds, and at Stoneyetts there are 140 beds, made up of six 40-bed villas. There is a large number of psychogeriatric patients, and I am sure the Minister will acknowledge that even today in Stoneyetts and Woodilee,

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

as elsewhere, we have an absolutely devoted staff that is dedicated to its work and entitled to far better housing than the Greater Glasgow health board is prepared to provide.

The Health Service in my constituency, as elsewhere in Scotland, has experienced cuts. I shall not dwell on that, but, if the Minister is not convinced, all the more reason for him to accept my invitation. He will certainly be unable to persuade the nurses and those who work in those hospitals that the cuts are merely in their imagination. The staff are working longer hours to make up for inadequacies.

There are no changing facilities for staff at Woodilee, and they are using patient facilities. That in itself is indefensible, but to encourage these people to return to houses that are vastly inferior to any reasonable standard is something that I know the House will not accept.

If the Minister accepts my invitation, he will see houses, most of which were built at Woodilee in 1875 and at Stoneyetts in approximately 1912. He will see evidence of precious few repairs and he will award no prizes at all for maintenance. He will see that virtually all the houses are damp and he will learn that 90 per cent. are in need of rewiring. He will see that most of the houses are far from wind and watertight, with roofs leaking, poor guttering, windows in need of repair and outside stairways which are far from secure.

I would like the hon. Gentleman to meet some of my constituents, who can explain their cases much more eloquently than I can. For example, Mrs. Barrie of 12 Carriesbrook puts on a switch and finds that lights other than those expected come on. I am sure that Mrs. Barrie is committed to the Christmas spirit, but that is extending things just a little too far. In addition, it is expensive and dangerous.

The Minister will, I hope, meet Willie Copeland, who has two children aged seven and four. Willie must pay between £450 and £500 a year for a fireplace to heat one room and to keep hot water. Another constituent, Jim Anderson, must pay £400 a year for his gas bill, even though, like most houses, his, too, has only one fireplace.

The same is true of apartments 3, 4 and 5 in this development. When the Minister comes—I am sure he will confirm a visit in his reply—he will meet folks like Evelyn Johnson, Ricky McManus, Rona Anderson and Ciz McMullen. They will tell the Minister—and I shall support them — that they want central heating, dampproof coursing, modern bathrooms and kitchens, new windows, rewiring and modern plumbing and sewerage arrangements. They are absolutely right to ask for each of those amenities and services. It is the very least we expect to meet modern housing standards.

Those of my constituents who are in such houses are aware that modernisation has taken place in the Strathkelvin and Monklands district council schemes. They want similar modernisation. If those of my constituents who are in modernised district council schemes were here they would support fully the argument for similar arrangements to be made for those who work for the Health Service. I make that point not because Health Service workers are envious of council tenants whose houses have been modernised but to confirm that it is right that in both circumstances tenants should be provided with the same opportunity.

We want our staff to live in reasonable conditions. The health board has acknowledged that by reducing rents people are living in inferior conditions. I wish to put on record the response of Mr. Philip Tilley, the Secretary of the Woodilee tenants association. When writing to the district administrator of the Greater Glasgow health board on 9 July 1983 Mr. Tilley said:

"A number of concerned tenants have asked the committee to write to you regarding your letter dated 22nd June 1983 informing us of the proposed abatement of rent and when it was to be implemented.

What concerns the tenants is that the abatement will in some way affect their rights as tenants and their right to have the repairs and improvements carried out. As you will appreciate, we do not feel that a 30 per cent. abatement would be adequate compensation for sub-standard housing or preferable if our rights were to be affected in any way. The tenants' committee would therefore ask that you give your assurance that the abatement in no way affects our rights as tenants.

We would also like to take this opportunity to enquire as to whether or not the £40,000 to £45,000 revenue per annum, from the Woodilee houses alone, might not be used to carry out the repairs. We would feel it only just that the rent we are paying should go to improving the properties.

In the light of recent government statements regarding the health service it would seem to us that the likelihood of these improvements being done grows increasingly slim. We would also be interested as to whether or not the government's plans might in any way affect your hopes that the improvements will be carried out this year.

We hope to hear from you in the near future. Yours faithfully, Philip Tilley".

The Minister will recall that the Prime Minister and other ministerial colleagues have often stated that the National Health Service is safe in their hands. Until these improvements take place my view is that the health of my constituents is not as yet safe in the hands of the Government. I should like an assurance on that point. We are seeking an improvement which represents a modern aspect of the National Health Service—and nothing less. Until recently the water supply of two houses was provided by fire engines. When some empty houses at Stoneyetts caught fire it was not very long before they were engulfed in flames and disappeared because of the absence of fire walls. I do not wish to spread fear and panic, but that is clearly unacceptable. I am sure the Minister would not wish to defend it.

The health of the tenants is a worry. There is evidence that children are suffering from kidney problems caused by dampness. One lady takes her family to live with her mother throughout the winter. I am sure that such circumstances are unacceptable to the House. In the absence of a positive response from the Government, Stoneyetts and Woodilee represent the Cinderella of the NHS in Scotland. My constituents would not expect me to accept that and to say nothing.

I have campaigned with the good people of Stoneyetts and Woodilee and COHSE to seek improvements in the houses, to ensure not what Scottish people would call a lick and a promise, but the full-scale modernisation to which those good people are entitled.

I thank the Minister for listening to the debate and for the response that he is about to make. I assure him that my constituents will consider his remarks carefully, because they will want to see for the people of Stoneyetts and Woodilee, not the bleak future that seems to be in store, but the sort of improvements that can only add to the status of the NHS in Scotland, for which the Minister has a major responsibility.

9.21 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for giving us the opportunity to discuss the condition of houses provided by the Greater Glasgow health board at Woodilee and Stoneyetts hospitals for the benefit of staff.

I know of the hon. Gentleman's keen interest in the matter, about which he came to see me in June. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased that the House is in a calmer mood than it was when he first attempted to initiate this debate on 21 November. I am sure that his constituents will be impressed by the fact that it is 9.21 am and we have waited through the night for the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst), in whose constituency some of the houses lie, would like to have been present, but he has asked me to apologise to the House for his absence. He is on parliamentary business in Edinburgh. Given the length of time that the business is taking, I suspect that my hon. Friend would prefer to have been here.

Hon. Members will know that all NHS property should be maintained to a satisfactory standard. Unfortunately, the standard of maintenance in the past has not always been as good as it might have been. The hon. Gentleman's description of the houses at Woodilees and Stoneyetts confirms that. The problem has been increasingly apparent in recent years.

In March 1980 it was agreed with the chairmen of health boards to set up a group—called the capital steering group—to review the health capital building programme. The group soon decided that a condition survey of existing stock was essential to its work. Such a survey was carried out, being completed early in 1981. The returns made it clear for the first time that a severe problem had built up over many years which could not be solved rapidly from within the normal revenue allocations of boards. It was estimated that the sum required to put matters right would be over £200 million. Accordingly, my right hon. Friend and I decided to provide extra resources from capital funds to attempt to reduce the backlog. Inevitably, it takes time to work up programmes, but we were able to make a start by allocating an initial £6·5 million to boards in the financial year 1983-84 for the purpose. So good was the uptake that we were subsequently able to increase the amount provided in that year to £9·4 million. As their upgrading programme developed, boards sought a total of £16·8 million for the current financial year.

We agreed to meet the whole cost of those programmes and, in the light of progress during the year, we have been able to provide additional amounts, so that, by the end of the year, we expect the total amount allocated to exceed £18·5 million. The House will not expect me to give an open-ended commitment for the future, but we are committed to tackling seriously and systematically the situation that has developed, and I expect, at worst, to maintain the allocation at this year's level.

I expect to learn early in the new year just how much boards themselves consider they can realistically tackle. I shall do what I can to provide the necessary resources. Boards are, I know, fully stretched in preparing suitable schemes. A great amount of detailed planning and negotiation is entailed, and the greatest care has to be taken to ensure that the funds are used to maximum benefit and are fully accounted for.

Nevertheless, having made a useful start, it is important and necessary to maintain momentum in tackling the very serious backlog maintenance problem. Of course we shall also have to take account of other demands for capital funds for new and replacement building. The responsibility for maintenance and for determining the priorities for the use of the funds made available naturally rests with the health boards. It is understandable that pressure from the public leads boards to think first about devoting resources to matters that affect patients most directly.

But it is still short-sighted to neglect maintenance altogether, and I have made that quite clear to boards. The money to which I referred earlier is being provided in an endeavour by my Department to get things back to rights. The buildings which can be improved and restored to a satisfactory condition will be upgraded in accordance with programmes prepared by them from the special allocation.

Of course, I also expect boards to carry out routine maintenance from their own resources. It would be quite wrong for them to perpetuate the errors of the past. In addition, new accommodation is constantly being provided, either directly from central funds or from the boards' own ordinary capital programmes. Some of the worst hospital accommodation has been closed and patients are being treated in new or upgraded wards. Total capital expenditure this year will be well over £100 million.

I turn now to the position of the Greater Glasgow health board. The board has benefited from the special allocation. Work to the value of over £3 million was carried out last year, and more than £6 million is expected to be spent on backlog maintenance by the end of March. It is for the board itself to determine where the money should be spent, and it is natural that the first thought should be to improve patient accommodation. Staff housing has, however, not been neglected.

I have referred already to the meeting that I had with the hon. Member for Monklands, West in June. I welcomed that meeting and the very fair way in which he made his views known, just as he has made them known today. I was able to tell him then that the Greater Glasgow health board was anxious to proceed with necessary upgrading work to staff houses in its care. It proposed to allocate £250,000 to this work out of the total of £6 million which it had sought and which had been allocated for the current year. It was its intention that part of that money would be spent on staff housing at Woodilee and Stoneyetts hospitals. Had that been its only concern, I have no doubt that work would have been well under way, if not completed, by now.

However, preparatory work for a wide range of schemes affecting much of the stock has taken a good deal of time. A major programme is being carried out at Woodilee hospital on various works costing £500,000. I hope that those staff who look around and think that there may be cuts in the Health Service will consider that work which is going on in their own hospital at Woodilee. They might then realise that those cuts are more imaginary than real. Indeed, we are spending more money than ever before on the Health Service.

Those parts of the hospital that have benefited include wards one to four, wards five and six, the pharmacy, the laundry, Craigie house and Woodilee house. As an

[Mr. John MacKay]

extension of that work a start has been made on upgrading the houses at Fauldhead and Woodilee cottages and at Stoneyetts. I am informed that the first stage of the work —a drainage contract involving houses in Carresbrooke avenue and Marweed avenue, Fauldhead, is due to be completed today. Similar work involving the houses in Blairhill avenue and Rutherford avenue and the Woodilee cottages is due to be completed on 10 January, and equivalent work at Stoneyetts, which is also under way, is due for completion on 18 January.

Going beyond this necessary preliminary work, a contract has been agreed covering the external work on the houses in Carresbrooke avenue and Robb terrace, Fauldhead; Woodilee cottages Nos. 15 to 18, and two houses at Stoneyetts. This work, which will cost in the region of £200,000, will commence on 7 January 1985, and the board is pressing ahead with the details necessary to let a further contract for the phase of the operations covering Marwood avenue, Rutherford avenue, Blairhill avenue, all at Fauldhead, and the remaining cottages Nos. 1 to 14 at Woodilee.

If weather conditions remain favourable, the work in phase one should be completed by the end of the financial year. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's specific point about ensuring that the work was done in a financial year.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but in saying,

"If the weather conditions remain favourable",

is he not confirming my criticism that the work should have started much earlier during the summer months? Has he had an explanation from the Greater Glasgow health board as to why that did not happen?

Mr. MacKay: I appreciate that it would be nice if all building work could be done in the summer months, but that is not possible. The building industry would not like that for a start.

I mentioned that the Greater Glasgow health board has a number of new building projects, schemes and problems of this nature on its books. Therefore, its staff resources have to be divided among those planning matters. Unfortunately, as the hon. Gentleman will know from his previous incarnation in local authorities, it takes time to draw up specifications and get tenders. But I hope that, if the weather conditions remain favourable, the first phase should be completed by the end of the financial year and the second phase should proceed immediately thereafter.

Mr. Tom Clarke: In view of the Minister's reference to my previous involvement in local government, it is necessary, in the light of my invitation to the Minister to come to my constituency, to say that I cannot think of any local authority which, having been given money by his Department, then waited five months without presenting evidence that it was anxious to spend the money.

Mr. MacKay: The Greater Glasgow health board is anxious to spend the money. Indeed, it is anxious that phase two should proceed immediately after phase one. Any remaining external work and such other internal work, including re-wiring, as the board decides to carry out will be met from the 1985-86 allocation.

The board is responsible for many other staff houses associated with hospitals throughout its area. While I have concentrated on the houses which are the subject of this debate, I know that the board is carefully considering the improvements which are required to its remaining housing stock, and also, importantly—this is a matter that I wish to develop a little — the extent to which it can now declare staff houses surplus to requirements and earn some income from their disposal.

Concern about under-used residential property in the NHS is widespread. I have recently arranged for copies of a report, carried out for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, to be issued to boards in Scotland, and they have been asked to look closely at their residential accommodation with a view to identifying and disposing of all that is not needed.

I want to make it clear that there is no threat to tenants of NHS houses who do not wish or cannot afford to buy their houses. We simply want them to have the opportunity to do so. Health boards have always shown themselves to be good landlords and the guidelines that I have laid sown should ensure that they continue to do so.

Officials of the board met members of the Woodilee tenants association early in November to tell them of their plans for improving the houses. Since then they are to be congratulated on the progress that has been made and on keeping in close touch with the tenants association. When the last meeting took place, a further meeting was arranged for 21 December to review progress. I hope that that meeting will be an opportunity both to review the real progress that has been made and to discuss the board's proposals for future improvements.

The hon. Gentleman has been constructive in his discussions with me and in the attention that he has paid to this important matter. I hope that if he attends that meeting on Friday, as I think he intends to do, he will be able to hear further details of the progress that I have outlined today. He will also be able to raise, along with his constituents, some specific points.

I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will keep me informed of progress, and I shall bear in mind his invitation to pay a visit to his constituency. I was flattered that he felt that a visit from me would be such a catalyst that work would progress apace and almost instantly. I hope that the work will progress apace without the necessity of a visit from me to stimulate it. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will keep me informed, and I hope that before next winter, certainly, his constituents will be living in upgraded and much improved houses.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Ten o'clock am.

House of Commons

PRAYERS

Thursday 20 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Civil Defence

1. **Mr. Charles Morrison** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities have started recruiting civil defence volunteers since December 1983.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): This information is not readily available in the form requested, but I understand that 36 county councils already have volunteers enrolled and of these 28 are currently recruiting volunteers and a further eight have plans to do so next year.

Mr. Morrison: That seems to be a reasonable start. Will my hon. Friend say whether the analysis of answers to the local government civil defence questionnaire has yet been completed and whether the constitution of the successful Devon volunteers might be recommended for other local authorities.

Mr. Shaw: With regard to the latter question, the activities of the Devon volunteers and, indeed, the contribution of the west country to civil defence exercises are a model and I trust that they will be looked at.

With regard to the main point of my hon. Friend's question, the analysis is complete and a report summarising the results has been placed in the Library. I welcome the evidence of progress that the results show, but many local authorities have much more to do. I intend that all local authorities shall carry out their statutory civil defence responsibilities, and we can enable them to do so by making the resources available.

To secure the implementation of the regulations we shall provide guidance to develop a programme of planned action and monitor progress, while holding in reserve the use of formal directions and the default powers available in the 1948 Act. The replies to the questionnaire provide the base line from which to develop a programme of work and the target dates. As a first step I have arranged that local authorities should be asked to complete the plans required by 31 December 1985.

Mrs. Clwyd: As there is no intellectual reason for civil defence, would it not be more prudent for the Government to persuade local authorities not to spend their money on such a foolish and wasteful exercise when the Government are starving so many local authorities of resources?

Mr. Shaw: No, Sir.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am a woman.

Mr. Shaw: I was correct in the first instance. I shall recommence. No, Sir. It is an essential requirement that local authorities make some sensible provision for civil defence emergencies.

Mr. Jessel: Is not a very clear intellectual reason for taking such measures simply that if an explosion took place 10 miles from where a lot of people live many could be saved by those measures? Even though the catastrophe of a nuclear explosion is unlikely, it still remains possible.

Mr. Shaw: Yes, Sir. That is a correct view. We must make a humanitarian response to emergencies.

Disaster Planning

2. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he considers that potential peace time major disasters require emergency plans for limited evacuation and relocation of population.

4. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to require local authorities to include integrated evacuation, relocation and shelter plans in their emergency plans.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): Many types of potential peacetime emergency will require that plans are made for the population to be evacuated from the vicinity of the incident and accommodated temporarily elsewhere. The preparation of such plans is a matter for local authorities, advised as appropriate by the Government. Local authorities are already required by regulations made in 1983 to prepare plans to protect the public from the effects of a nuclear attack.

Mr. Bowden: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that a number of local authorities have already made voluntary evacuation plans? In those circumstances would he consider giving some force to guidelines to encourage other local authorities to follow suit as quickly as possible?

Mr. Brittan: I am aware that some local authorities have made plans. I dare say that in doing so they have been assisted by the guidance given in the 1975 circular and I hope that other local authorities will find that circular of continuing value in making their plans, which are certainly worth doing.

Mr. Knight: Does my right hon and learned Friend agree that not only is there a case for issuing general guidelines, but that some monitoring should take place to ensure that those guidelines are acted upon? Will he give the House an assurance that should any local authority decline to carry out its duties in respect of emergency planning he will take the appropriate action?

Mr. Brittan: I think that we are talking about two different things — civil emergency plans and plans in respect of armed conflict and nuclear attack. With regard to the civil plans, compliance with the voluntary guidelines to which I have referred has been good, and I do not see the need for further powers, although the House will know that regulations implementing the European Community's Seveso directive were laid on 18 December and come into effect on 8 January 1985. With regard to the plans dealing with nuclear attack and other armed

conflict, my hon. Friend the Minister of State has explained the position regarding local authorities' co-operation.

Mr. Pawsey: Clearly it might be difficult to have evacuation plans for the entire population, the size of the island being somewhat limited. Can my right hon. and learned Friend therefore say what plans he has for persuading local authorities to identify structures and buildings in their areas which might be used as refuges in an emergency?

Mr. Brittan: As my hon. Friend may know, we are preparing, in consultation with local authority associations, technical guidance for local authorities on how they can conduct a survey to identify existing accommodation that is suitable as a shelter. I think that that is the most useful guidance that we can give. It will be as straightforward as possible and designed to minimise the resources required.

Mr. Skinner: What good are guidelines to local authorities which have been financially crippled by the Government?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman obviously does not appreciate that there is no local authority which is not able to comply with the civil defence requirements, because the financial regime amply permits that to happen.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend about peacetime disasters? Can he tell the House whether the existence of evacuation plans is a condition precedent to the granting of planning permission when there is an application in respect of factories that carry out dangerous processes? If there is no such requirement, can he say whether he will consider talking to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment with a view to making such a condition necessary?

Mr. Brittan: In the case of hazardous chemicals there is a requirement of notification to local authorities of the details of the chemicals concerned. I think that my hon. Friend's point is covered in that way.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: Will the Home Secretary accept that it is far more important to develop plans for dealing with peacetime emergencies and disasters than to fritter money away on futile, misleading and unnecessary civil defence? Is it not a scandal that Government grants are available for the latter and not for the former?

Mr. Brittan: No, I do not accept that it is possible to make that distinction, although I hope that the hon. Gentleman's remarks indicate that he will support the amendments that we propose to introduce to the Civil Defence Act, which will add flexibility to the expenditure of civil defence grant-aid. However, it does not follow that because it is necessary to prepare for civil contingencies it is not equally important to prepare for nuclear or conventional attack, knowing, as we do and as my hon. Friend has pointed out so clearly, that proper preparation could save lives. We all have a duty to do that.

Broadcasting (Political Balance)

5. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has plans to seek to amend the statutory provisions governing political balance in broadcasting.

Mr. Brittan: No, Sir.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Home Secretary believe that the broadcasting authorities should simply recognise the political balance that is frozen within this House, or do they have a responsibility to accept the dynamic changes that are taking place? Does he further recognise that a growing body of public opinion believes that the broadcasting authorities' presentation of political news is unfair and that the majority feel that it is particularly biased in favour of the Government and unfair to the Liberal/SDP alliance? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brittan: It would not appear that most of my hon. Friends share that perception.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is a perfect balance at the moment, because it is not the fault of the BBC or the other media if they do not know Liberals from SDPs, or Socialists from Militants, as no one else in the country does?

Mr. Brittan: I agree with my hon. Friend. Those are some of the problems with which the broadcasting authorities have to contend.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Home Secretary agree that it is important that the television and radio companies should be fair in their political coverage? If so, can he think of any better balance than that of public opinion, as opposed to the balance of seats in the House?

Mr. Brittan: It is certainly true that broadcasting authorities must ensure that people are not unfairly treated in respect of the material that is broadcast. As the hon. and learned Gentleman will know, legal proceedings are pending on this matter, so I should not go into it in greater detail.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Home Secretary aware that he has had no complaint this afternoon from the Social Democrats and that they are not here to line up with the Liberals, because they have not turned up for work, and they know that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is never off the BBC?

Mr. Brittan I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his unique insight into the thinking of the Social Democratic party.

Entry Clearance Applications

6. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operation of the primary purpose rule in relation to application for entry clearance by husbands of British citizens.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): In considering applications for entry clearance by husbands of British citizens entry clearance officers apply the immigration rules approved by Parliament in the light of the decisions of the immigration appellate authorities.

Ms. Short: Does the Minister admit that the rule that requires a man to prove that it is not his primary purpose to come to the United Kingdom when seeking entry for marriage discriminates unjustly against British women of Asian origin, and that hundreds of them are unable to marry the man whom they wish to marry? Even worse,

does he agree that there are couples who have children, and whom the Minister accepts have genuine marriages that will last for life, whom he is refusing to allow to be together in the United Kingdom? Can any civilised country defend that rule?

Mr. Waddington: No Sir, and the hon. Lady is obviously referring to a particular case in which she has taken a great interest. That case proves clearly that it is perfectly easy to apply the primary purpose test and that it is fair to do so. If a person who is interviewed on the Indian subcontinent says that it has been his ambition to come to Britain for a long time, since his cousins are here, that he wants to come to Britain to earn more money and that he decided to achieve that ambition through marriage, it is not difficult to conclude that his primary purpose in marrying was to get here. The House must face the fact that it would be absurd if, having tightened up on work permits for young men who would do unskilled jobs here, we allowed exactly the same young men to come on to our labour market by using marriage as a device.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that many of the immigration rules are being grotesquely abused? What steps can he take to tighten them up?

Mr. Waddington: As my hon. Friend knows, there is a very sophisticated appeals machinery. In the case which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) has in mind, a person whose application was turned down, appealed to the adjudicator and then to the immigration appeals tribunal. In both cases——

Ms. Short: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I know what it is.

Ms. Short: The point of order is that the Minister is giving a false version of a case that is going on in my——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was wrong, I did not know what it was. It would be extremely helpful if the Minister did not go into too much detail, as to do so activates supplementary questions that are rather too long.

Mr. Waddington: I certainly have no intention of going into detail, but it is apparent from the hon. Lady's point of order that she was referring to a particular case.

Ms. Short: I was not, I have hundreds of cases.

Mr. Waddington: It is right that I should point out that in the case to which the hon. Lady referred the decision of the entry clearance officer in the subcontinent was upheld by both the adjudicator and the immigration appeals tribunal.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister not aware that Asian people actually fall in love and want to get married? By what right does he set himself up as judge and jury between people who want to get married out of love, and people who, in his mind, want to get married for the sake of convenience?

Mr. Waddington: I want to make it plain that the primary purpose rule is not an attack on marriage and is certainly not an attack on the system of arranged marriages. What it does attack is marriage being abused and used as a means to get entry into this country.

Mr. Marlow: In view of the very real and proper pressures on public expenditure at present, is my hon. and learned Friend of the opinion that money spent on the Commission for Racial Equality and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants is public money well spent?

Mr. Waddington: I think that that question goes very wide of the question on the Order Paper.

Mr. Snape: Does the Minister accept that the primary purpose rule referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is unjust and unfair? Will he also accept that the inhuman and bureaucratic delays to which all these cases are subject are also inhuman and unfair? Finally, will the Minister do something about these delays, instead of subjecting the House to an arrogant monologue as he has done this afternoon?

Mr. Waddington: I think, first, that I have explained adequately that the rule is not unfair. It would be grotesque if people were able to use marriage as a device to get into this country when they are not qualified to come here to work under work permit rules.

I have given the House the figures on delays on many occasions. Delays are shorter now than they were under the Labour Government.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the number of unemployed in this country is already too high and that to import more people to do the same few jobs is not a good idea?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We simply cannot allow marriage to be used as a device to enable people to come here and go on to the labour market at a time of high unemployment.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: How can the Minister possibly defend the primary purpose rule when he admitted in this Chamber that one out of every four cases falls foul of the rule? That means, in effect, that nearly 1,000 people a year are being refused access to the fiancées they propose to marry.

Will the Minister also tell the House that the reason for the rule is to play to the racists on the Government Benches and has no real value whatsoever as an immigration control?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentlemans is wrong in his statistics. The failure rate of applications by husbands and fiancés to come to this country has dropped quite dramatically. In 1982 the overall refusal rate was 63 per cent. In 1983 it dropped to 47 per cent. Refusals on the ground of primary purpose are running at about 25 per cent., and on primary purpose and another ground at 33 per cent.

Mr. Murphy: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that all immigration rules should be applied strictly but fairly, and that it would be wrong for any Member of Parliament to abuse his or her position in that respect?

Mr. Waddington: I am not quite sure what my hon. Friend is referring to, but I am sure that hon. Members do not wittingly set out to abuse their privileges. I think that sometimes the facility allowed to Members of Parliament to approach a Minister to ask for a man's temporary admission, while they make representations, can be abused. I recollect that recently a person affected by the primary purpose rule remained in this country for months and months, and is still here, as a result of a Member of Parliament making representations.

Ms. Short: The Minister is referring to my case again.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister has displayed the naked racism that underlies the way in which this rule is administered. The hon. and learned Gentleman is completely distorting the statistics. Since the period 1980 to 83, refusals on the ground of primary purpose have risen 25-fold, and the Minister takes pleasure in causing that rise. Is he not aware that this deliberate and inhumane distortion of the primary purpose rule is persecuting British women who want the same right as everybody else to live in this country with the husbands of their choice? The Government should be downright ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Waddington: As shadow Home Secretary, a right hon. Member should have more than one speech. We have heard that one before. I pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman that one can take any statistic and find that the rates of refusal under this Government compare favourably with those under the previous Government. As usual, the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to distort the statistics. He refers to the proportion of refusals on the ground of primary purpose compared with the total number of refusals on other grounds. In fact, the only realistic way to assess the matter is by the number of primary purpose refusals as a percentage of all applications. Those figures show that it was easier for husbands and fiancées to establish a right to enter the country in 1983 and 1984 than it was in 1982, before the 1983 rules came into force.

Civil Defence College, Easingwold

7. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much time he expects the principal of the Civil Defence college, Easingwold, to spend on co-ordinating civil defence volunteers.

8. **Dr Glyn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibility the principal of the Civil Defence college, Easingwold, will have in advising local authorities on what organisation to adopt for their civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: How to optimise the allocation of his time seems a matter best left to the principal's judgment in the light of his experience and the respective needs from time to time of the college and volunteer co-ordination. The precise organisation for volunteers is a matter for local authorities to decide in the light of the guidance available to them in Home Office circular ES 2/1981 and any advice offered by the principal.

Mr. Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that volunteers in the civil defence movement are in the front line of that programme? Does he also agree that we need many more and better organised volunteers? Surely this matter would be better in the hands of one person, who would be better able to co-ordinate the activities of local authorities and other voluntary organisations?

Mr. Shaw: I entirely agree that it is important to recognise the importance of volunteers and to encourage them to join the civil defence movement. However, the decision regarding the principal will make the resources of the Civil Defence college available to him in his task of improving the recruitment and training of volunteers.

Dr. Glyn: As my hon. Friend has answered the main question, may I now ask him a more important question? In the event of hostilities, is my hon. Friend satisfied that, after regional government has been installed, the role of the Army will be sufficiently important and well established to view what will be essentially a military rather than a civilian capability? As the emergency will be dealt with by civilians who, incidentally, will not be elected, is my hon. Friend satisfied that the Army will be able to execute its duties?

Finally, I thank my hon. Friend for his work on this subject.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend has asked a very fair question. The degree of co-operation between the civil defence and the military is already very close. Might I remind him that earlier this year we began an exercise in the north-west of the country which will bring together all the emergency services as a training exercise. That will include the Army's contribution, which is very important. May I conclude by wishing my hon. Friend a merry Christmas.

Mr. Hill: Will my hon. Friend say how any organisation of civil defence volunteers can be set up in local authority areas, such as Southampton, which declare themselves nuclear-free zones and take no precautions whatsoever? Have they some mysterious treaty with Moscow saying that they are nuclear-free zones and should be excluded——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is rather wide of Easingwold.

Crime Prevention

9. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will provide financial assistance to those local authorities wishing to introduce crime prevention schemes.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No, Sir. The Government are, however, making money available through the urban programme for local authority projects that contribute directly or indirectly to the reduction of crime or the alleviation of its effects; and the crime prevention unit which my right hon. and learned Friend set up within the Home Office last year is providing advice and assistance to local authorities in the design, introduction and evaluation of crime prevention initiatives.

Mr. Boyes: Given the increase in crime under the Government, does the Minister agree that the cash from the urban aid programme is simply not enough? Is he aware that many local authorities want to fit spy holes, chains and special locks to the homes of old-age pensioners? Is he further aware that the proposed £1 billion cut in capital spending announced yesterday will make these essential jobs even more difficult to carry out? My own local council has managed to equip 11,000 houses and the Opposition want more authorities to do that, does that not once again show theat it is we and not the Government who care for the elderly?

Mr. Shaw: I disagree with the hon. Member on that. There is plenty of opportunity for a well-organised local authority to make significant improvements connected with crime prevention, at absolutely minimal cost. The hon. Gentleman knows that there is a major campaign abroad to try to achieve just that.

Mr. Lawrence: Will my hon. Friend consider whether the best way in which he can increase the deterrents to

burglary would be to give tax relief for the installation of burglar alarms and other home crime precautions? Perhaps he would consider discussing that with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Shaw: I am well aware of that argument, and my hon. and learned Friend is right to pose it. The question of giving any special relief from VAT obviously poses great difficulty, because it was designed as a broad-based tax. Frankly, I fear that tax is not really a suitable instrument for the fine adjustment needed to reflect other aspects of the Government's policy, such as crime prevention.

Mr. Corbett: Given that rising crime means a rise in the number of victims, how can the Minister defend spending only £46 million out of a budget of £3,000 million on law and order services to help the victims of crime?

Mr. Shaw: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Victim relief is one of the important areas of crime prevention. We must make certain that society sees that it can properly care for the victims of crime. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the substantial growth of the voluntary organisations, which are designed to do that.

Mr. Stanbrook: Instead of giving extra financial assistance to local authorities will my hon. Friend consider increasing the establishment of the Metropolitan police, which, after all, was fixed in 1965, since which time the demands upon its manpower have increased enormously? Why do we not give attention to increasing the policing of London's streets?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend will, I know, be aware that the establishments are under review and, indeed, that there has been a modest increase in the establishment of the Metropolitan police this year, but he has a fair point.

Mr. Soley: Is it not time that the Minister gave up any pretence of crime prevention in much the same way as his hon. and learned Friend seems to have given up any pretence of racial equality? Is it not a fact that the crime figures released yesterday, which show a 9 per cent. increase on the third quarter of last year, demonstrate that this is not a Government of law and order, but a Government who utter pious platitudes on crime prevention and victim support at the same time as they sit back and watch disorder and crime rising throughout the country?

Mr. Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has done more than any of his predecessors to increase the effort to prevent crime. The fact that the crime figures were indeed a major disappointment yesterday should not distract attention from the major efforts made by the Government.

"Civil Defence—The Basic Facts"

10. **Rev. Martin Smyth** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to publish an updated version of "Civil Defence—The Basic Facts".

Mr. Giles Shaw: Yes, Sir. Early next year.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister recognise the need for a range of well-presented and readable books for the guidance of the increasing number of civil defence volunteers?

Mr. Shaw: I do indeed, and it is for that purpose that we are reviewing all the literature connected with civil defence.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend be sending copies of the literature to Left-wing authorities, whose refusal to have anything to do with civil defence is a denial of their humanitarian duty to care for all people in peace and war?

Mr. Shaw: I shall be very pleased to do so, and to do more than merely send the literature. We intend to ensure that local authorities respond to the regulations of 1983.

Metropolitan Police (Code of Conduct)

11. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to put before the House of Commons his new code of professional conduct for the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Brittan: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that his handbook of guidance for professional conduct will be published in the new year. He intends at that stage to send copies personally to all hon. Members with constituencies in the Metropolitan police district. I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House at the same time.

Mr. Atkinson: Is the Home Secretary aware that many well-informed people who are concerned with civil rights, and also with improving relations between the police and the public, are anxious to discuss the details of the code because they believe that it could be a contributory factor to both aspects? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman therefore do his best to encourage the Leader of the House to bring the code before the House for full debate as soon as possible in the new year?

Mr. Brittan: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I cannot add to that, but I agree that the documents to be published are of great importance; and amount to a real effort by the police to deal with matters which affect us all.

I hope that I shall be allowed to pay tribute to the former deputy commissioner, Mr. Laugharne, who has been closely involved in the production of these substantial and creative documents, but who, sadly, had to resign earlier this month because of ill health.

Mr. Greenway: Has my right hon. and learned Friend seen some of the damaging and unpleasant documents produced by the so-called GLC police committee at a cost to public funds of some £8 million? Will he ensure that the morale of the Metropolitan police is not allowed to be damaged by the appalling activities of that committee?

Mr. Brittan: The morale of the Metropolitan police is much more dependent on the knowledge that it is doing a job in a very professional way, that it has the support of the overwhelming majority of the people of London and that the committee to which my hon. Friend referred has no standing or authority whatever.

Visitors (Entry Statistics)

12. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of visitors refused entry to the United Kingdom have been granted temporary admission between January 1984 and the latest available date.

Mr. Waddington: The information is not available in the form requested, but between 1 January and 30 September, which is the latest date for which figures are available, 6,358 passengers were granted temporary admission either pending completion of their examination or following refusal of leave to enter. During the corresponding period, a total of 13,400 people were refused leave to enter.

Mr. Lamond: As I am one of the hon. Members who have used as much influence as they have with Ministers to obtain temporary admission for relatives of their constituents—and I am not ashamed of that—may I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that, as far as I know, none of those for whom I obtained temporary admission did not present themselves for return to their home country? If that is the case, does it not suggest that the regulations are applied rather harshly, particularly at Heathrow? They seem to trap many people who are perfectly innocent visitors to this country.

Mr. Waddington: I do not think so, but obviously it is my duty to see that immigration officers carry out theirs correctly and do not refuse admission unless they are not satisfied that a person is a genuine visitor. I remind the House that temporary admission is an alternative to detention and not a substitute for admission as a visitor, and that temporary admission should properly arise only when hon. Members believe that they have a proper case to put the Minister on the ground that the immigration officer has made a mistake.

I have a further comment that is relevant to the attack made a moment ago by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). In 1983, 7,292 people were granted temporary admission, compared with 3,874 in 1978. So much for the draconian enforcement of the law by the Conservative Government. We have granted temporary admission far more often than the Labour Government did.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that my experience as one who represents an area of high immigration with many visitors is that he is extremely fair and even-handed in dealing with the matter?

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that. The matter has to be put in perspective. Lower than 1 per cent. of those coming from the Indian subcontinent were refused entry last year. Again in reply to the ridiculous attack made by the right hon. Member for Gorton, that refusal rate is similar to the refusal rate under the Labour Government.

Mr. Dubs: Is it not the truth that the way in which visitors are treated at Heathrow airport and other points of entry is racially discriminatory? Is it not the truth that most visitors who are refused entry are black or come from the Asian subcontinent and that the device of temporary admission provides one way for the Home Office to take some of the heat off itself? Finally, will the Minister confirm that the tiny proportion of those granted temporary admission who do not leave the country on the due date is a sign that almost all those people should have been allowed in as of right?

Mr. Waddington: I do not for one moment concede that the system is racially discriminatory. However, if the system is racially discriminatory now, it was certainly racially discriminatory under the Labour Government. It has not changed one iota since the hon. Gentleman's party was in office, except that we are more generous on temporary admission than the Labour Government ever were.

Coal Industry Dispute

13. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instigate a public inquiry into the policing of the mining dispute.

Mr. Brittan: No, Sir.

Mr. Barron: Does the Home Secretary accept that many right hon. and hon. Members will be dismayed by that answer? Will he explain why the Minister of State with responsibility for the police, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw), made an unannounced visit to my constituency and visited four collieries, yet spoke neither to striking miners nor to others in the community who have had to live with a massive police presence for the past 10 months? Like many other hon. Members, I see that kind of action by Ministers as nothing short of irresponsible.

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to know what goes on in his own constituency. My hon. Friend did have meetings with community representatives and representatives of the National Union of Mineworkers, but that does not seem to relate to the question. I am happy to elaborate on the answer by saying that, given the opportunity for any action to be tested in the courts—as has happened—and for any complaint against the police to be ventilated through the statutory mechanism, I see no need for an inquiry such as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mrs. Currie: Does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise the gratitude of working miners all over the country, and especially those in my constituency, to the police, who have enabled them to go to work safely? Will he join me, on behalf of those working miners, in wishing all the policemen who have helped them a very happy Christmas and a more peaceful new year?

Mr. Brittan: I do so gladly.

Mr. Kaufman: Is it not a fact that through the miasma of distortion which the Government have created on this issue the Home Secretary was forced to admit yesterday in his press notice about crime that the number of notifiable offences in connection with the miners' dispute has not had any material effect on national crime figures, despite the fact that under his stewardship crime has risen in the past year by 9 per cent. and now stands at near national record levels? Is it not in the interests of the police and the public that we know exactly what takes place on picket lines and that a public figure such as Lord Scarman is put in charge of an independent public inquiry?

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Gentleman has not begun to make out a case for such an inquiry. He merely seeks to cloak his own embarrassment at what is being done in the name of the Labour movement.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend is paying an official visit to Hong Kong.

Mr. Pawsey: While thanking my right hon. Friend for that imaginative answer, may I draw his attention to events nearer home, specifically to the visit of the Russian delegation to the United Kingdom? The visit is receiving much favourable comment and seems to be heralding a thaw in the cold war. Will my right hon. Friend say whether he feels that that will continue, and comment on its implications for increased trade between Britain and the Soviet Union?

Mr. Biffen: I hope earnestly that my hon. Friend is right in saying that the visit will presage an improvement in relations between the Soviet Union and Great Britain. It does no harm to reflect that at various stages in our national destinies the people of Russia and of the United Kingdom have been joined in a common and vital interest.

I believe that our prospects of increasing our trade with the Soviet Union will depend upon our competitiveness, as happens elsewhere.

Mr. Kinnock: Apart from his personal friendship with the Secretary of State for Defence, what can possibly justify the appointment of Mr. Peter Levene as Chief of Defence Procurement? By accepting a mere £95,000 a year, does the right hon. Gentleman think that Mr. Levene is pricing himself into a job?

Mr. Biffen: No, but I can say this: my right hon. Friend is in a good position to judge who should fulfil this vitally important task, and in going to the world outside Whitehall he is merely repeating past practice with Lord Rayner. My right hon. Friend's actions will stand every test.

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, but why £95,000 a year, and why this particular individual? Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that Opposition Members and many other people, in the House and elsewhere, think that the appointment and everything connected with it stinks?

Mr. Biffen: One of the privileges of this place is that people may make easy and cheap jibes at those outside without having to take the consequences. The task of managing an £8,000 million budget is formidable indeed, and the price tag of a salary of £95,000 a year is not unrelated to what will be returned to the private sector.

Mr. Kinnock: Many things may be said about Mr. Levene, but at £95,000 a year for five years he certainly is not coming cheap. Will the right hon. Gentleman now answer my question? What possible justification can there be for an appointment at double the salary of the current appointee, and what justification can there be in savings to the national Exchequer and effective defence procurement? Is it not a fact that the whole recent history of the nature of the Government's relationship with this man has given grounds for great suspicion?

Mr. Biffen: The judgment of Mr. Levene's ability was made by my right hon. Friend. A man who successfully executes a job at £95,000 a year is a damn sight cheaper than a failure at half that salary.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Andy Stewart: In view of the historic decisions by the Nottinghamshire NUM today to take steps to protect its members, would my right hon. Friend like to give a Christmas message to Arthur Scargill?

Mr. Biffen: As this is a period of charity before Christmas, I wish to make it quite clear that my last exchange with the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition should not in any sense be construed as casting a reflection on Mr. Perry. Indeed, I am prepared to exemplify a spirit of charity in respect of those outside the House who cannot answer back. That is sadly lacking in the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Wareing.

Mr. Biffen: May I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), to whose question I am still replying, that my message to Mr. Scargill is very simple. There exists a NACODS' agreement which provides an excellent framework for a return to the negotiating table.

Q2. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wareing: Will the Leader of the House say what is the Prime Minister's view of the fact that while delicate negotiations are being carried out with Mr. Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet delegation, the Reagan Administration is precipitously awarding defence projects in order to make progress on star wars technology? Where is the special relationship now?

Mr. Biffen: There is absolutely no inconsistency in being a loyal member of NATO and a strong supporter of the United States presence in that organisation, while at the same time expressing the view about star wars technology that we have recently done.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to televise the proceedings of the House would be a thoroughly bad thing?

Mr. Biffen: That is a matter for individual judgment. No doubt when, in due course, we have had the opportunity to assess an experiment in another place, we shall have a chance to convert the matter from a generalised observation to a specific vote.

Q3. **Mr. Willie Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hamilton: Reverting to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, I wonder whether the Leader of the House accepts that the Prime Minister, as the First Lord of the Treasury, must have approved that salary of £95,000, while at the same time she was lecturing workers to the effect that the only way that they can get jobs was by accepting lower wages. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell her, when she comes back from world junketing at the taxpayers' expense, that the natives are getting increasingly restive and angry at the overt corruption and incompetence of her Government?

Mr. Biffen: Of course my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister approved the appointment and salary to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Doubtless, in making her judgment, she took account of the fact that Mr. Levene

was earning a great deal more in the private sector. The hon. Gentleman referred to the corruption of the Government——

Mr. Hamilton: Hear, hear.

Mr. Biffen: He now re-emphasises that. That language falls easily from the hon. Gentleman's lips, but I must tell him that it is more likely to consolidate support for the Conservative party than anything else.

Q4. **Mr. Brinton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brinton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that after the festive season those of us who are lucky enough will have to pay a little attention to our weight? Does he also agree that we might be healthier if, after Christmas, the Government pay a little more attention to reducing the total of public expenditure instead of finding new ways to tax us?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that the Government will be happy to turn their energies in that direction, and I am very hopeful that they will be fully supported by those on the Benches behind me.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bearing in mind the need for care on the sensitive issue of former civil servants transferring to public companies, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether it was part of the deal that Frank Cooper, former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, should become chairman of Mr. Peter Levene's former company?

Mr. Biffen: It was not part of the deal.

Mr. Pike: Does the Leader of the House recognise the severe concern of householders throughout the country at the announcement of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment this week which has made it virtually impossible for many councils to meet the requirements for improvement and repair grants? Indeed, many councils in the year ahead will not even be able to meet the commitment for mandatory grants. Will he give the assurance that the Cabinet will reconsider this and make more money available so that councils can meet the urgent requirements for housing needs?

Mr. Biffen: This matter was debated considerably yesterday. The factors which the hon. Gentleman mentioned were undoubtedly uppermost in the minds of those who took part in the vote that concluded that debate. I do not believe that this subject is likely to be reopened, but all these matters are subjects of continuing political concern.

Q5. **Mr. Amess** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Following the most reasonable rate limitation settlement placed upon Basildon district council, does my right hon. Friend agree that the council will still be able to provide excellent services, but should stop wasting ratepayers' money on propaganda exercises such as the recent advertisements placed in *The House Magazine*?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. Friend is in a good position to judge what can be done by Basildon council in the context of rate limitation, and I am most encouraged by his view.

Mr. Hume: Is the Leader of the House aware of a recent inquest decision in Northern Ireland which found that an innocent housewife had been killed by a plastic bullet? Is he further aware that an investigation by an inspector of the RUC found that the police evidence to that inquest was completely false and that evidence given under oath that is completely false is called perjury? Will he ask his right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General why he will not reopen this case?

Mr. Biffen: Clearly I cannot comment on the facts of the case, but I shall undertake the hon. Gentleman's requests.

Q9. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Leigh: What deep cultural service to the nation is provided by a pop station such as BBC Radio 1 which should prevent it for ever more from being financed by advertising?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point which will be undoubtedly be included in the wider debate about the BBC licence fee, which the House will consider after the recess.

Mr. Tony Banks: When the Leader of the House next sees his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, will he ask her to drop her personal veto against Miss Sarah Keays being included on the Conservative party list of approved candidates? Such a veto is a discrimination against both women and single-parent families.

Mr. Biffen: That really tells us more about the hon. Gentleman than it does about the Conservative candidates' list.

Q10. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. MacKay: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to put into perspective the week's events, both here in Westminster and abroad, and point out to the House that the most historic event has been the signing in Peking? That has led to an improvement in Anglo-Chinese relationships, and will also lead to increased trade with China.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. As our future foreign policy will increasingly be related to influence, as opposed to actual executive power, there is no doubt that our relationship with the Far East will turn considerably on the future role and status of Hong Kong.

Q16. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: When the Leader of the House sees his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, will he ask her to come to the Dispatch Box and condemn picket line violence by the police?

Mr. Biffen: That is the most obvious and plain wife-beating question that I have ever heard asked. I have no intention of responding.

Q17. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend ask the Prime Minister if she has full confidence that the BBC can give a good service to the public and advertise?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly pass on that point to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but I suggest to my hon. Friend that these are arguments that are awaiting the debate, which will come reasonably soon.

Mr. Ryman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Directly arising out of questions?

Mr Ryman: I wonder whether you will give the House some guidance on the following point, Mr. Speaker, which arose during questions to the Home Secretary? One of the Ministers answering them, who is not on the Front Bench now, was the Minister of State, the hon. and learned Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington). He repeatedly gave inordinate and repetitious answers which took so long that it prevented other hon. Members who had legitimate supplementary questions to ask from being called. Will you consider that practice and condemn it when it arises again?

Mr. Speaker: I must say to the hon. Member that I made mention of that at the time. That was why I allowed a rather larger number of supplementary questions from Back Benchers on that question.

Ms. Clare Short: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The same Minister of State, Home Office who is no longer on the Front Bench, in my view abused his position at the Dispatch Box to give a very distorted account of the case of one of my constituents where there is a small——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an attempt to continue Question Time. The hon. Lady made that point during Question Time on a point of order and I cannot take it again now.

Animal Experiments (Petition)

3.32 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I ask for your advice, Mr. Speaker? This morning at noon, three hon. Members of this House presented a petition signed by 300,000 members of the public against animal experiments outside the Home Office——

Hon. Members: "Inside."

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does this arise out of questions?

Mr. Banks: No, not out of questions but on a separate point of order.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Member has started I shall allow him to continue.

Mr. Banks: I am seeking your advice because after the petition was presented, the three Members of Parliament were subjected to what can only be described as offensive abuse from the Metropolitan police. We were trying to carry out our duties as hon. Members of this House and I would ask you to rule, Mr. Speaker, whether interference by the Metropolitan police in charging two hon. Members of this House and my personal assistant with obstruction was in fact——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot possibly rule on a matter which is sub judice.

Questions to Ministers

3.34 pm

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Prime Minister's Questions today consisted of 108 questions, 105 of which were exactly the same. I thought that a lot of time was wasted, first, by the Leader of the House having to repeat the same answer each time a question was raised and, secondly, by the calling of Members who were not here to ask their questions. Therefore, several of us did not have the opportunity of asking a question. I suggest that instead of a draw being made a fortnight before of questions that are exactly the same, so that hon. Members come to the Chamber and are called in that order, we should have an open 15 minute session in which members are called at random by you, Mr. Speaker. Thus, we can ask a straightforward question and not have to waste time with the answers such as the Leader of the House was giving today.

Mr. Speaker: The answer, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is that if he feels strongly about it he should raise the matter with the Procedure Committee. What I do at Question Time, in so far as possible, is to ensure that those hon. Members who have questions on the Order Paper are called. That is why we reached Question 17 today.

Mr. Boyes: Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), three policemen were involved—No. AC 871, No.——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot entertain that question.

Business of the House

3.36 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for the week after the recess?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for the first week after the Christmas Adjournment will be as follows:

Wednesday 9 January — Second Reading of the Shipbuilding Bill.

Remaining stages of the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill and of the Mineral Workings Bill.

Thursday 10 January—Second Reading of the Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill.

Debate on European Community Documents on fisheries relating to the overall arrangements for total allowable catches and quotas for 1985. The relevant document numbers will appear in the Official Report.

Friday 11 January—Debate on the fourth report from the Select Committee on the Environment on acid rain, House of Commons Paper No. 446, and the relevant Government observations Cmnd 9397. The Debate will arise on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[Debate on fisheries documents on Thursday 10 January 1985:

Relevant Documents

(a) 10171/84 Fishery total allowable catches in Community waters, 1985

(b) 10264/84 Fish guide prices 1985

(c) 10697/84 Fishery Conservation, technical measures

(d) 11515/84 Quotas for 1985

(e) 11452/84 Member state quotas for Norwegian waters 1985

(f) 11453/84 Norwegian fishing in Community waters

(g) 11451/84 Member state quotas. Faroese waters

(h) 11450/84 Faroese fishing in Community waters

(i) 11423/1/84 Spanish fishing in Community waters

(j) 11513/84 Member state quotas in Greenland waters

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 5-i (1984-85), para. 4

(b) HC 5-i (1984-85), para. 3

(c) HC 5-iv (1984-85), para. 6]

Mr. Kinnock: On this side of the House and, I suspect, elsewhere there will be concern that the debate on the fourth report on acid rain from the Select Committee on the Environment is to be taken on a Friday. In view of the importance of this issue, may I urge the Leader of the House to reconsider that decision and to arrange the debate at a time which permits a wider involvement of hon. Members?

May I also press the right hon. Gentleman to provide time in the early part of next year for a debate on the threatened closures of post offices? This subject clearly concerns hon. Members on both sides of the House, it is viewed with growing alarm by the general public and that would be an appropriate time to discuss the issue.

May we look forward in our first week back to a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence both on the appointment of Mr. Peter Levene as chief of procurement and, especially in view of the evidence given to the Select Committee on Defence in the earlier part of this year, the appointment of Sir Frank Cooper to United Scientific Holdings as replacement for Mr. Levene?

When may we expect to have the Budget in 1985?

Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that we shall have a debate on housing and home improvements after the Prime Minister has returned from her foreign travel, as the Tory Whips will not then be able to use the excuse of her alleged embarrassment in order to get unwilling Members into the Lobby in support of the Government?

Mr. Biffen: The plan to hold the debate on the report on acid rain on a Friday is, I realise, disappointing to the right hon. Gentleman. However, I believe that the House must accept that a Friday is a legitimate day on which to consider major business as we now get on to the Adjournment at 2.30 pm on such days. As the right hon. Gentleman has made the request, the matter will be considered through the usual channels, but I must say that there is a very strong presumption on my part that such reports are legitimate matters for Friday business.

Perhaps the question of the closure of post offices can be considered through the usual channels. I acknowledge that interest in it has been shown from the Opposition Front Bench.

Although I noted the wish that yesterday's debate should be re-run, just as yesterday's margin was greater than had been popularly expected, I suspect that a re-run would be even more comforting. However, I have noted the right hon. Gentleman's concern.

I will, of course, consider through the usual channels the question of a statement on the defence matters to which he referred.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to introduce his Budget on Tuesday 19 March 1985. I hope that it will be for the convenience of the House to know the date so early.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the recent review of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' static workshops is throwing hundreds of people out of work, including almost 200 in my constituency? Is he further aware that there is widespread resentment in my constituency because no statement has been made on the Floor of the House and no debate has so far been permitted? I urge the Government to allow a debate in Government time so that hon. Members who are affected are not left merely with the chance of an Adjournment debate on the subject in the small hours of the morning.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises a point which is serious for his constituents and is of national import also. I must tell him candidly that no Government time is available during the first week after the recess and I therefore suggest that he uses whatever opportunities are available to hon. Members.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the Leader of the House urgently consider bringing before the House legislation to control the activities of retired senior civil servants, bearing in mind the fact that if Sir Frank Cooper says much more than "Good morning" at his first United Scientific Holdings board meeting he will probably be in breach of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act?

Mr. Biffen: In his good natured remarks the hon. Gentleman avoided saying that Sir Frank will have allowed to elapse the required period before he can enter private service. There is no prospect of the legislation suggested by the hon. Gentleman being introduced.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Will the Leader of the House consider arranging an early debate on civil defence? In view of the obvious diversion of opinion on both sides of the House, it would be advantageous to clear up these matters.

Mr. Biffen: I shall take on board my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that one of the first tasks for the Prime Minister when we meet again will be to come to the Dispatch Box and make a statement on Mr. Levene's appointment? Is the withdrawal of the Whip from a Tory peer intended as a warning to some of his right hon. and hon. Friends about their behaviour in 1985?

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman knew a little more about all the factors related to his second point, he would not detain the House with such a matter. On his first point, the hon. Gentleman will have noted the reply that I gave to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House when it will have an opportunity to debate the report of the Public Accounts Committee on the evasion of vehicle excise duty?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot do so. However, there is a mechanism for parliamentary consideration of such reports. The issue is serious and I take note of what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): As all hon. Members understand the importance of obeying the law, will the Leader of the House provide an early opportunity in 1985 to debate the matter as hundreds of thousands of private companies deliberately defy the law by refusing to file their accounts or annual reports at Companies House? Many firms also defy the law with respect to wages councils. As the law exists, does not the right hon. Gentleman believe that it should be obeyed by everybody and that we should have a brief debate on that in 1985?

Mr. Biffen: I note the hon. Gentleman's point, which is substantial and long-standing. However, there is no prospect of Government time for such a debate early in the new year.

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): In view of the fact that the south-west water authority—and, no doubt, other similar authorities—intends to introduce new water rates in mid-February, will my right hon. Friend tell the House when the Government's proposals for the new rating arrangements will be put to the House for approval, especially as some of us find the proposed water rates totally unacceptable?

Mr. Biffen: If my hon. Friend is referring to the rate support grant, he will not have to wait too long.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I reinforce the question about changing the date of the debate on the report on acid rain and ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the closure of post offices before they are closed? May I also ask the Leader of the House to arrange for a debate on the Floor of the House of the prayer tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Housing Benefit Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1984, because the House will no doubt wish to have clarification of the Government's motives in withdrawing housing benefits from miners who are paying rent to their relatives for their accommodation?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into the question of the prayer that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

He will appreciate that the more one argues for matters to be taken on the Floor of the House, the more one underlines the importance of Friday as a constructive day in the parliamentary week.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): In view of the Government's problems with the Civil Aviation Bill, will my right hon. Friend consider having an early debate on the report on the expansion at Stansted, because such a debate might show the Government the way in which opinion in the House is moving and enable them to inform the proceedings of the Committee on the Bill?

Mr. Biffen: As my hon. Friend may have noted, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is to make a statement this afternoon on the first matter. On the second point, I realise the general desire for an early debate on the inspectors' report, but a number of hon. Members have informed me that they want a certain amount of time to assess the formidable volume of evidence that is contained in the report.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): In view of the positive response that there has been to the visit of Mr. Gorbachev and the rest of the IPU delegation—although, in fact, all Mr. Gorbachev said was already on offer, and was either concealed or distorted—would not it be a good idea to assist the drawing together of our two countries by having at least a statement from the Dispatch Box about what has been done in our name at the Stockholm confidence-building conference, which has now been going on for almost a year?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Has my right hon. Friend noted the report in this morning's newspapers that the Liberal party is to press for the reduction of the voting age to 16? Will he reassure us that the House will not waste time debating such a scatty notion?

Mr. Biffen: If such a proposal were ruled to be in order, there would be absolutely nothing I could do about it, but I think that the House would thoroughly enjoy the debate.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): Is the Leader of the House aware that it is more than five years since the Royal Commission on legal services presented its report to the House, and that, although there have been several requests for a debate on this important subject, no time has been given for it by the Government? Does the right hon. Gentleman hold out any realistic prospect of having a debate on the report in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Biffen: I regret to tell the hon. Gentleman that there is no prospect of such a debate taking place during the first week after we return from the Christmas recess, but I shall of course bear in mind his anxiety.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As local authorities clearly have a great deal of trouble with housing—sometimes it is of a very low standard—will the Government, when they bring back their proposals on housing expenditure, put forward proposals to encourage the expansion of the private rented sector and to encourage some local authorities to divest to the private sector some of their housing assets so that they may be better managed and at less cost to the public?

Mr. Biffen: The best thing I can do is to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Leader of the House aware that, during last night's Adjournment debate and the debate on the Consolidated Fund, there were repeated references to two documents — one produced by the five academic accountants, which has been revised and published this week in the "Accountancy" magazine, and the other the London Business School document—both of which challenge the National Coal Board's accountancy arrangements? Is he aware that he himself repeatedly alludes to "frameworks for negotiation"? In so far as those documents could provide the basis on which negotiations could take place, does he agree that the House of Commons deserves a statement so that we may all learn the truth about the value of NCB figures?

Mr. Biffen: I certainly see no prospect of a debate on that topic during the week we come back. It will be up to the people who conduct the negotiations within the coal industry to assess the documents.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Silberston report on restraints on trade in textiles and clothing caused concern in those areas which are dependent for employment on such industries? As there has not been a major debate on textiles during this Parliament, will he endeavour to arrange one as soon as possible and before the Government form a view prior to the MFA negotiations?

Mr. Biffen: I recognise the very important role that textile industries play in many constituencies and, therefore, the influence they have upon the time of the House. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the point that has been made.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May I make my annual appeal to the Leader of the House to allow time to consider the awful and uncompassionate state of the law and practice on shoplifting? Meanwhile, will he join me in urging shoppers who wish to have a pleasant Christmas free from fear to take very great care not to be wrongly charged with that offence?

Mr. Biffen: I did not realise that the hon. and learned Gentleman made the appeal but once a year. Of course I take note of what he says.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Will my right hon. Friend follow his normal practice and let the House know what the business will be on Monday 14 January?

Mr. Biffen: No. It is not customary to announce Monday's business when one makes a statement before a recess.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Since the Government came to power on the promise of protecting our freedoms, does not the Leader of the House think that we should have a debate on the further erosion of those freedoms when the major clearing banks have written to every branch of every bank asking for details of the private bank accounts of NUM employees at Sheffield? Does not he also think that we should have a discussion on the powers given to the sequestrators, which apparently are the same powers as those provided by the Act dealing with enemies and aliens during the last war?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that the hon. Lady will realise that there was a debate on the matter of the sequestrators earlier today. I cannot helpfully comment on the first point, but the hon. Lady may like to pursue the matter as a private Member.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): As one of those pressing my right hon. Friend to find time to debate the report of the Select Committee on the Environment on acid rain, may I thank him very much for finding that time in the first week after the Christmas recess? As for the rather surprising and churlish remarks of one or two hon. Members about the debate being arranged for a Friday, will he accept—at least from myself—thanks for his courtesy in giving 22 days' notice, which means that even the most tardy Member of Parliament should be able to arrange his constituency engagements in order to be here?

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind and reassuring comments.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Leader of the House recall that on Monday the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement about the Bank of England's commitment of £75 million towards the Johnson Matthey rescue when he either was misleading the House or being misled by the people concerned, because, according to today's information, that £75 million has now risen to £100 million, and there are forecasts that the Bank of England —the taxpayers' bank—will have to be committed to figures in excess even of that?

In view of that statement and those events, would it not be sensible for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make another statement? Even more important, should not we have a debate on the affair so that the Government are not caught as previous Governments were caught when the Crown Agents were involved in similar difficulties with the result that we did not have a debate on the matter until the Crown Agents were in debt to the tune of over £200 million?

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the £100 million to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a post-rescue transaction from the Bank of England to its new subsidiary, Johnson Matthey Bankers Ltd. It is a normal banking transaction and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor did not know of the deposit on Monday. There is no reason why he should have known.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): In view of the forthcoming Geneva talks and the great interest both in the House and in the country on these matters, will my hon. Friend see whether he can arrange a debate on arms control soon after our return?

Mr. Biffen: While I fully accept the importance of the topic to which my hon. Friend refers, I confess that I cannot see the likelihood of Government time being available for such a debate in the near future.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Leader of the House take more seriously the request for a debate in Government time on the mining dispute in view of the fact that at least two accountants' reports published in the last month have seriously criticised and undermined the National Coal Board's basis for its pit closure programme?

Mr. Biffen: I do not accept the immaculate validity of those accountants' reports which are endorsed by the hon. Gentleman. There is no likelihood of such a debate on the mining industry being held in the first week after the Christmas recess. The reason is the formidable and important programme of legislation that I announced a few moments ago. However, we shall keep the matter under consideration.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the latest report of the Top Salaries Review Body and allow it to range as widely as before to enable hon. Members to consider whether some Opposition Members give value for money? Will he also commend the Attorney-General for the excellent pressure that he is bringing to bear on the students union of the polytechnic of North London which sent £5,000 of public money to striking miners? The Attorney-General's actions in this matter are greatly appreciated, and I hope that he will see them through.

Mr. Biffen: As to my hon. Friend's first point, I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I note with gratitude the comments on the second point.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will the Leader of the House assure us that the Government will provide time for a full day's debate on regional assistance? He will recall that a large number of hon. Members tried to speak on the subject when a statement was made earlier this month. He must recognise that serious concern is still felt about the Government's policy on regional assistance.

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to confirm that we shall have a full day's debate on regional aid. I cannot state precisely when, but it should be soon.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): In view of two recent perverted and disgraceful cases of sexual offences involving children, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement to be made following the meetings that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has had today? The public deserve to know that this can be controlled and cut out at a stroke.

Mr. Biffen: I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall refer his anxiety on this immensely important topic to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that we do not waste any of the House's time debating the manic and ludicrous suggestion made in the early hours of this morning by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that members of the security forces are roaming round the country bumping off ladies to filch documents relating to the Belgrano?

Mr. Biffen: I can promise that no Government time will be made available for such a debate and certainly not in the first week after the recess.

Civil Aviation Bill

3.58 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about the Civil Aviation Bill.

The House gave the Bill a Second Reading on 21 November, by a majority of 78, and committed it to Standing Committee F for consideration. However, on two separate occasions, Tuesday 11 December and Tuesday 18 December, the Committee voted against the sittings motion.

The Bill is required whatever decisions are taken in relation to the inspector's report on Stansted and terminal 5. The Government will need the powers in the Bill if at any time it is decided to impose a limit on air transport movements at any British Airports Authority airport for environmental reasons. Equally it will need the powers, even if the environmental limit at Heathrow were not imposed, because both Heathrow and Gatwick are rapidly approaching the point when demand for runway space will exceed the physical capacity for extended periods of the day.

Proceeding with the Bill would not therefore have prejudiced the decision that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I will have to take on the inspector's report. Nevertheless, the Government suggest that further consideration of the Bill be postponed until that decision has been taken.

I note that the Chairman has reconvened the Committee for 12 February. I must make it clear to the House that it is very likely that no decision on Stansted/T5 will be possible by then. We shall therefore in due course seek to arrange through the usual channels with the Chairman when the Committee shall meet again.

I hope that this procedure will be in accordance with the wishes of the House.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that with a little common sense on his part this problem would not have occurred? Will he accept that it is entirely due to his own arrogance that this unique public humiliation is taking place this afternoon? How can he say that

"demand for runway space will exceed the physical capacity"

when the chairman of the Heathrow scheduling committee and the British Airports Authority have both indicated that the true physical capacity of Heathrow is greatly in excess of the present ATM limit? If there is such a problem, why on earth is the right hon. Gentleman refusing international flights into Manchester, to give one example?

When does the Secretary of State anticipate the announcement regarding Stansted and terminal 5? Is it the Government's intention to hold a debate in the new year on United Kingdom aviation and airports policy? I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that the Government should follow the example of the last Labour Government and publish a White Paper embracing both airports and aviation so that we can see what their national policy is, if they have one.

Will the announcement today further delay the privatisation of British Airways? If so, does the right hon. Gentleman anticipate a painful interview when the Prime Minister returns? The long distance praise from Peking which appeared on his behalf in this morning's newspapers might in some circles be likened to the vote of confidence received by the average football league manager shortly before the axe descends on his neck.

Mr. Ridley: It is usual for the Government, when a Bill has received a sizeable majority on Second Reading, to proceed to take the Bill through Committee. I have never before heard anyone suggest that it is arrogant to frustrate the will of the majority of the House. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that again he has got it wrong. It is not only a question of annual capacity into Heathrow and Gatwick; it is a question of capacity at certain times of the day and certain times of the year. Without these powers, congestion will occur.

I cannot possibly forecast or guess when my right hon. Friend and I will be in a position to give a decision on the inspector's report into Stansted and terminal 5. Also, any example from the last Labour Government will certainly be eschewed by this Government as being a dangerous precedent to follow. Furthermore, it is of no relevance to talk of the future of British Airways on this statement.

Sir Humphrey Atkins (Spelthorne): Does my right hon. Friend recollect that it is almost exactly five years since his precedessor with responsibility for these matters, Sir John Nott, together with the then Secretary of State for the Environment, now the Secretary of State for Defence, issued a statement confirming that the Government intended to impose a limit of 275,000 air traffic movements at Heathrow? The statement was well received by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Londoners and others affected by Heathrow who are looking to him to honour the Conservative Government's promise.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend is completely correct. The Government have attempted to honour that promise by introducing a Bill and by taking it to Committee. Those who have frustrated the progress in Committee are those whom he must blame if it proves impossible to get the legislative powers to implement that limit. To boot, I have been called arrogant by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) for attempting to do that. Will he at least tell his constituents where the blame might lie?

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I came to the House this afternoon to praise him for the statement which I understood he was to make? Does he recognise that he is in danger of risking a certain amount of exasperation among his colleagues if he persists in believing that there is no connection between the contents of the Bill and the decision on airports policy? Does he further recognise that he will exasperate hon. Members if he does not realise that he must not pick and choose between the pledges that he honours?

Mr. Ridley: I think that on this matter praise from my hon. Friend could prejudice my quasi-judicial role in relation to the inquiry. If the Government did not proceed with the Bill, they would appear to be accepting one part of the inspector's recommendations, which might prejudice our position.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): As the Secretary of State has missed the plane, will he give the House an assurance that he will miss the bus and bury his plans to abolish public bus services and most of the concessionary fares?

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I thank my right hon. Friend for persevering with help for the environment of those who live around Heathrow, but may I remind him that in the terminal 4 inquiry the inspector recommended a maximum of 260,000 ATMs as the limit of what the environment could take? Furthermore, does not my right hon. Friend find it remarkable that, although the Liberal party claims to care about the environment, the Liberal representative on the Committee, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross), helped to defeat the sittings motion?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right, and he is absolutely correct to say that the Liberal party does not show the consistency in these matters of which I am accused, although such consistency seems to me correct.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) clearly shares the views of many Conservative Members—views of which the Secretary of State was clearly not aware? He needs time over the recess to digest the content not only of the report but of the views of his own party. Only when that has been done and there has been a debate on Stansted and on putting airports into the regions, where they and the jobs are needed, will the House be in a fit state to consider the Bill again, either in Committee or on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Ridley: Yes, but it will be of considerable comfort to my hon. Friends whose constituencies are situated around Heathrow to be able to point out that the Liberal party is not in favour of protecting their environment but has voted against proceeding with the Bill which would have had that effect, and that the Liberal party is more interested in frustrating the majority of the House than in protecting that environment.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): May I thank and congratulate my right hon. Friend on making this decision. It will enable us to consider all questions relating to airports in a saner and more realistic way.

Mr. Ridley: I thank my hon. Friend and express the pious hope that when the Government finally bring forward across-the-board proposals for airports he will express that same support.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Secretary of State has made it clear that the problem is about peak air traffic movements. Will he tell the House why the Government are making plans to deal with peak air problems and not with continuous and urgent problems for public expenditure on housing and health?

Mr. Ridley: The Bill under discussion has no implications for public expenditure. Also, it is not only an airport peak problem. The powers in the Bill would enable the Government to impose the environmental limit on Heathrow, as is the pledge given by predecessors in my office and which the people living around Heathrow expect the Government to give.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): We on the Standing Committee are certainly keen that my right hon. Friend's quasi-judicial position should in no way be prejudiced but would it not have been better had he come to the House and said unequivocally that he intended to withdraw the Bill in its entirety until he had decided on an airports policy? Any fudging of the air transport movements limit question is impossible as in paragraph 1A of the report the inspector says that the 275,000 limit is unjustifiable on environmental grounds because the noise criteria will no longer apply as from next year there will be new noise regulations and quieter engines. Furthermore, the air traffic control considerations will not apply — the scheduling committee itself gave that evidence to the Transport Committee. Will not my right hon. Friend listen to the advice of British Airways, which also says that the limit is entirely unjustifiable?

Mr. Ridley: Surely the boot is on the other foot. Would not my hon. Friend be prepared to listen to the other side of the case that he has just put and to the reasons why to have proceeded with the Bill would not have had the effect that he fears and would certainly not have prejudiced the decision on Stansted? Instead of being prepared to listen to those arguments, he preferred to vote in favour of the debate being terminated. Does that mean that he does not have quite the faith in his own arguments that he suggests?

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Given that the Secretary of State has had to bow to the democratic process brought about by his hon. Friends and by my hon. Friends and has had to accept the need for a proper review of airports policy and a debate on the Floor of the House, will he also guarantee that the democratic process will be maintained and that there will be a vote in the House on a motion on Stansted and that he will agree to be bound by that decision?

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who is listening to this interchange of views, has made it clear that there will be a debate on the Stansted terminal 5 issue. I am sure that I am right to leave the form and nature of that debate to him.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it would be entirely wrong to allow the opinions of the planning inspector, who is no more than an adviser and whose report differed from that of the previous inspector who reported on the fourth terminal, to override the clear commitments of the Government to millions of people living around Heathrow?

Mr. Ridley: I agree that it is difficult when two distinguished inspectors reach entirely opposite views on the matter, but the Government have tried to secure the legislation that is necessary to impose such a limit and, as my hon. Friend knows only too well, we could not have tried harder. If we do not succeed, he will know precisely who is to blame. May I make it clear that it was not only three of my hon. Friends but a large number of Opposition Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "All of us."] All of them. That is why my hon. Friend's constituents may have difficulty in the future.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): May I say as a member of the Committee how glad I am to see the Secretary of State relieved of his considerable embarrassment and let off the hook? To see him squirm during two separate sittings was an extremely uncomfortable experience for hon. Members on both sides of the Committee.

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to look at the substantial claims of the regions. Some of us view the Bill and the Stansted report as a further attempt to hijack resources from the south-east of England when vast

regions in Britain are suffering from very substantial unemployment. Decentralisation of air services would lead to substantial employment at airports in the regions which could do with the substantial investment that the Government clearly intend to put into Stansted and possibly into a fifth terminal at Heathrow.

As someone who has spent five years going twice a week to and from Heathrow when I live only 10 minutes from an airport, may I say that it is high time that we made use of the substantial resources that already exist at, for instance, Cardiff airport?

Mr. Ridley: Nothing would please me more than to see greater expansion and prosperity in all of Britain's regional airports. I have some good news for the hon. Lady: considerable extra investment for Cardiff airport has been approved this afternoon. That makes it harder for me to understand why the hon. Lady is not in favour of discussing a Bill which would have limited the number of flights into Heathrow. Without such a limit, presumably more flights will go into Heathrow and fewer into Cardiff.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall endeavour to call the hon. Members who have been standing, because I know that this is an important matter for their constituencies and for themselves, but I think that we should move on at half-past four.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): In considering his decision on the Eyre report, will my right hon. Friend take fully into account the increase in aircraft size? If he does, he will appreciate that it is terminal capacity at Heathrow that will be the problem in the 1990s and beyond and not runway capacity. Will he acknowledge that the decision—I hope that he can give us a better idea of when it is likely to be made—will have a profound effect on the date on which we can sell the shares in British Airways to the general public?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot comment on the contents of the inspector's report, as that would be to prejudge our decision, nor can I tell my hon. Friend when it is likely that my right hon. Friend and I will be in a position to make that decision. That would be pure speculation. But I repeat that none of the matters that the House has been discussing this afternoon is remotely connected with the privatisation of British Airways.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): As one of the members of the Committee which delayed the Committee proceedings on the Bill, I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that I was one of the many who supported the principle of the Bill and still do. I have never accepted that to give my right hon. Friend the powers necessarily meant that the 275,000 limit or other matters were cast in stone. We in this House must accept that we have a responsibility to view carefully and fully all matters that are relevant to the Bills that we are working on, and in this case it was nonsense to believe that we could not study, at least in some depth, the report on Stansted before we went into Committee. I believe that when the Committee reconvenes it will be much better equipped to argue fully the amendments already tabled and many others. Then we shall see Parliament working at its best.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking the sensible position that, after having a chance to study the inspector's report, it would have been wise to proceed to debate the Bill, because so many of the questions which have been raised this afternoon and outside the House could well have been addressed in the debate on the substance of the Bill.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): In the spirit of the season, may I thank the Secretary of State for saying this afternoon that the Bill will at least be postponed? When the debate on Stansted does take place, will he, first, identify the date on which the pledge on Heathrow which has been referred to was first given to this House rather than referred to outside and, secondly, will he agree that we should have a free vote on the issue of Stansted?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot without notice give the exact date when my predecessor, Sir John Nott, gave the pledge, but I point out to my hon. Friend that a pledge, whether given inside or outside the House, is interpreted as a pledge by the world at large, and little distinction is made. A pledge is dependent upon the person who utters it rather than the place where it is uttered. My hon. Friend's second point about a free vote is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his usual wisdom in withdrawing the Bill at this stage? However, I am sure that I am not alone in being considerably alarmed that he persists in the view that there has to be a limit at Heathrow. Will my right hon. Friend agree that he is a supporter of the market and that the market determines these things, and that the airlines themselves are the best judges of whether Heathrow should be expanded? Will he assure the House that he will not repeat the remark that he made on BBC Radio 4 the other night to the effect that, without these powers, there will be chaos at Heathrow next summer, because that will manifestly not be the case and it will not help the debate?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, but Heathrow is within 10 per cent. of its total physical capacity. At certain times of the day in the busy season there is already a conflict between different aeroplanes which wish to land at the same time. For safety reasons, if for no other, the time will soon come when there must be some form of control. As no powers exist for that, we must proceed to take them sooner or later.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement seems to be a rational way forward? Will he bear in mind that a great many people in the south and east midlands are very much in favour of Stansted and hope that he will make an early decision in favour of it?

Mr. Ridley: I must not say anything in response to my hon. Friend's kind words that would suggest that I had any preconceived ideas about the decision on the inspector's report.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents, together with many other constituents who live in the vicinity of Heathrow, will congratulate him on his strong stand——

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): He has just lost.

Dr. Glyn: Not yet — in confirming what the Government have promised on numerous occasions, and as recently as 1984?

Mr. Ridley: The derision and mirth with which the Opposition seem to greet the news that those living around Heathrow may have to suffer increased noise and disturbance show an absolutely cynical disregard both for the Government's pledges and for the interests of 500,000 people, some of whom my hon. Friend represents.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I deeply regret the need to delay the progress of the Civil Aviation Bill and I welcome the Secretary of State's constructive and measured statement, but will he confirm that the pledge given to the country in 1979 by his predecessor was given on the basis of noise nuisance and the damage to the environment? If so, will he please tell the British Airports Authority that he will not tolerate its proposal for an increase in landing charges of 244 per cent. for the quietest private domestic scheduled airlines, and the removal of all charges entirely for the noisiest international jets?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot tell the British Airports Authority anything unless Parliament grants me the relevant powers to do so.

Mr. Steen: My right hon. Friend has them.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): May I welcome the fact that the reintroduction of the Civil Aviation Bill will not occur until after debate and decision on the Stansted report? May I also express the hope that that will ensure time for thorough, fruitful and rational discussion of the Bill's implications for the small airlines, the south-east and the regional airlines?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said today, though I was not quite so grateful last Tuesday. I hope that it will be possible to have thorough, fruitful and rational discussions on these issues, although I slightly regret that we could not have them on the Bill, which would have been an excellent vehicle for that purpose.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept that much further delay in this matter is likely to lead to the establishment of the third London airport and the business that it attracts not at Stansted or Manchester, but at Schiphol?

Mr. Ridley: I fear that my hon. Friend is talking of a real possibility. That is why I hope that when we return to our discussions on the Bill we shall do so in the context of an airports policy which will allow the House to permit the Bill to make progress.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I thank my right hon. Friend for taking today the judicious decision that he has announced to the House. In pursuit of that judicious decision, and in the obvious desire for a rational discussion on airports policy, will he persuade the Leader of the House that there should be a debate on a substantive motion relating to the Stansted report before the Committee stage of the Bill is resumed?

Mr. Ridley: Grateful as I am to my hon. Friend, that must be a question for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. We will certainly wish to hear everything that the House has to say. As my hon. Friend knows, we will not be able to contribute matters of substance to the debate because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and myself will in the end have to make the ultimate decision, and we must not prejudice that decision.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will my right hon. Friend give me guidance as to what I should say to the representatives of Humberside airport when I meet them if the Bill eventually reaches the statute book in its present form? Can I give them the assurance that flights from Humberside to Heathrow will continue?

Mr. Ridley: Yes; I think that there would be no difficulty in my hon. Friend doing so. I should have liked to have had the opportunity of giving many such reassurances, had we been able to proceed with the debate on the Bill.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend remember that many millions of people live within a short travelling distance of Manchester airport and that they would welcome an opportunity to debate how that most profitable airport should be allowed to develop free of all restrictions?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government have repeatedly made it clear that they would like to see everything possible done to allow all the regional airports, including Manchester, to expand their traffic and to grow. However, I hardly think that that question arises on the Bill.

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): As one who is opposed to the expansion of Stansted as London's third airport, may I ask my right hon. Friend to give to my constituents a pledge that we shall have debates both before and after the Government decision?

Mr. Ridley: I am not able, or willing, to prejudice the position of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. He has listened to every word that has been said today and will, I am sure, take note of them.

Select Committee Reports

4.27 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise with you the question of the use of uncirculated Select Committee reports. As you may know, the Public Accounts Committee recently took evidence from the DHSS following allegations that the British Oxygen Company could be abusing its monopoly position as supplier of oxygen to the National Health Service. The allegations were sparked off by complaints to the College of Health and others, reported in *The Guardian*, of excessive profiteering on the back of lucrative contracts. Such allegations are still being fuelled by the announcement of Mr. Richard Giordano's increase in salary to £771,000, but that is not relevant to my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

My point of order relates to BOC's use of uncirculated Select Committee documents as a basis for potential litigation. On 26 November the DHSS gave evidence in public to the PAC on the question of oxygen supplies. On 27 November the BOC chief executive for corporate communications, acting on behalf of Mr. Giordano, approached Mr. Rose—Clerk to the PAC—and asked him for a copy of a transcript of oral evidence so that

"BOC could submit further evidence if they found it necessary."

The Clerk to the Committee agreed, citing precedent, and on the strict understanding that it was supplied to the company in its capacity as a potential witness. Members of the Committee were not aware of the existence of that transcript until the night before last, when I was informed that *The Guardian* had a confidential transcript of our proceedings. I checked with the newspaper and was informed that that was not the truth, but that BOC had had a copy since the end of November and that it had been quoted from, at length, with large chunks of evidence in a letter dated 30 November from BOC to *The Guardian*. I have a copy of that letter.

In the form of a letter, and using a transcript that has been provided in confidence, BOC threatened *The Guardian* with the possibility of legal action and reference to the Press Council unless it agreed to meet BOC to discuss the retraction of articles in *The Guardian* on BOC's activities. Our confidential document was provided to BOC by the Clerk to the PAC without PAC Members having seen it, approved it or amended it. It was supplied to BOC strictly on the basis that it was to be used in the submission of further evidence. PAC Members received copies of the report only two days ago. The document was used as a basis for potential litigation and reference to the Press Council. British Oxygen attempted to muzzle *The Guardian* by using a confidential Select Committee document.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman should bring his comments to a halt, because he is now going into detail that may be prejudicial to any inquiry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: By sending a transcript of our proceedings to a national newspaper, *The Guardian*, BOC was making public our papers. I use those words advisedly.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall now stop the hon. Gentleman. I have listened carefully to what he has said and I believe that he has raised a matter which is a possible contempt of the House. He must write to me about it and not pursue the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I shall do that immediately, Mr. Speaker.

Sub Judice Rule

4.32 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a breach of the sub judice rule. During this morning's debate on the BBC the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) referred to certain matters which are the subject of legal proceedings in a case in which I am a plaintiff.

Although I was not in the House at that early hour, I have obtained a transcript of the proceedings from the Library. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) pointed out to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North that his remarks breached the sub judice rule, but the hon. Gentleman proceeded with them. The hon. Gentleman was then warned by the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker), who was in the Chair, that although the Chair did not know the exact state of the proceedings on that case, it might be as well if the hon. Gentleman were to avoid referring to it. Despite those two warnings, the hon. Gentleman continued to make remarks which, I believe, were prejudicial to the action which is now proceeding.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North said that at present there were no cases before the courts involving the matters to which he referred and that none were set down for trial. In fact, two actions of mine were set down for a hearing on 19 November and the BBC's solicitors were informed of them in a letter from my solicitors on that day.

Other hon. Members are also involved in separate actions which emanate from the same subject matter. I have spoken to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and invited him to withdraw his remarks and to apologise to the House for his breach of the sub judice rule. He has refused to do so and I seek your protection, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman continues to refuse to withdraw his remarks and to apologise for them, will you require him to do so?

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). I, too, am a plaintiff in proceedings against the BBC. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) should have known that the actions were set down. He made no attempt to contact me, but to judge from his remarks he was clearly aware that I was a party to the proceedings. I, too, seek your protection in this matter, because there is only one way in which a Member of this House or any other citizen may seek to clear his name against television mis-reporting, and that is through the courts. You will know that that is a very lengthy procedure.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I make it clear that in my comments early this morning I did not mention either of the two hon. Gentlemen who have raised the matter with you or any of the other hon. Members who are engaged in those cases. I sought advice at 3 o'clock this morning and was told that no cases had been set down for hearing on this issue. Clearly, that advice was wrong, and I accept that. I acknowledge what the hon. Gentleman said, and I am happy to put the record straight.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I do not think that anything else can arise. It is clearly very important to remind hon. Members that whenever we discuss anything in the House we bear in mind the subjudice rule.

Later——

Mr. Neil Hamilton *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is a different point of order, because we have disposed of this matter and I do not think that I can take it any further. I shall be very cautious about hearing the hon. Member.

Mr. Hamilton: I merely wish to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Knowsley, North has not withdrawn the remarks which are on the record, and has refused to apologise. Once again, I seek your protection.

Mr. Speaker: I thought that I heard the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) say — *[Interruption.]* Did the hon. Member not say that he had received incorrect advice and that he withdrew those statements?

Mr. Kilroy-Silk *indicated assent.*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us be rational. The statements are on the record, so they cannot be withdrawn, but the hon. Member has put the record straight.

Stansted Airport

4.37 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the Business Statement the Leader of the House quite properly invited an hon. Member who asked him about the debate on Stansted to await the statement of the Secretary of State for Transport. In due course the Secretary of State for Transport, when questioned about the debate on Stansted, referred the matter back to the Leader of the House.

Because of the great concern on both sides of the House about the debate, its form will be important and we shall want to know whether there is to be a vote on a substantive motion. We have had a statement from the Leader of the House, and I ask for your assistance so that I may know how to proceed on the matter.

Mr. Speaker: I think that that is a matter for the Leader of the House, and no doubt at the appropriate time we shall know that.

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 1984.
2. Friendly Societies Act 1984.
3. Lochaber Water Power Order Confirmation Act 1984.
4. Highland Regional Council (Uig Pier, Skye) Order Confirmation Act 1984.
5. Lochmaddy and East Loch Tarbert (Improvement of Piers &c.) Order Confirmation Act 1984.
6. British Railways Order Confirmation Act 1984.
7. Greater London Council (Money) Act 1984.

BILLS PRESENTED

Shipbuilding

Mr. Secretary Tebbit, supported by Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Norman Lamont, and Mr. John Butcher, presented, under Standing Order No. 111 (Procedure upon Bills whose main object is to create a charge upon the public revenue), a Bill to extent the period in relation to which schemes under the Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Act 1978 have effect and to extinguish all outstanding liabilities in respect of the loan made to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Limited by the Shipbuilding Industry Board: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 51.]

Water (Fluoridation) Bill

Mr. Secretary Jenkin, supported by Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, and Mr. John Patten, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the fluoridation of water supplies: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 52.]

Tobacco Products (Sports Sponsorship) Bill

Mr. Roger Sims, supported by Mr. George Foulkes, Mr. Nigel Forman, Mr. Laurie Pavitt, Mr. Toby Jessel, Mr. Clement Freud, Mr. Robert Sheldon, and Sir Anthony Meyer, presented a Bill to provide for a ban on sponsorship of sporting events by tobacco companies to be achieved by progressive reduction of expenditure; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 8 February and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Tyne and Wear Metro (Rateable Value) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Anti-Competitive Practices (Exclusions) (Amendment) Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1919) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978

4.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Review of the Operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978; accepts the continuing need for temporary emergency powers; recognises the need to maintain as fully as possible the liberties of the individual; and looks forward to considering the Government's legislative proposals.

We are discussing this afternoon the late Sir George Baker's review. The Government and the House clearly need to look at Sir George's conclusions against the background of the security situation in the Province today. I have not yet had a chance, except fleetingly at Question Time, to discuss and listen to the views of right hon. and hon. Members on security policy and I am glad that there is a natural opportunity to do so today. If we allow our decisions on security matters to be swayed entirely by our reactions to the latest event or the latest propaganda campaign, then we shall probably decide wrong. It we are to get our decisions right, we must look at the whole situation with clear eyes and that is what we can do today.

But first I am sure the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to the work of Sir George Baker, whose last public duty was the preparation of this report. In studying it I have come to appreciate the qualities that he brought to bear on the task. It is a hard business to strike the correct balance between protecting life and property, and protecting civil liberties in a free society which is plagued by terrorism. Sir George examined that balance with diligence and sensitivity. Much of the material, is necessarily arid, but he treated it in a lively style which makes the report a good read. I believe that he accurately identified the issues which the Government and Parliament must consider when examining the provisions of the Act. We broadly agree with both the tone of his report and its conclusions, and I welcome this opportunity to listen to the views of the House upon them.

I should like first, before I turn to the recommendations, to speak more generally about the security background to them. The aim of our security policy is not to contain terrorism or to achieve an acceptable level of terrorist violence. Our aim is to eradicate terrorism and to restore peace and normality so that all the people of Northern Ireland can go about their daily lives free from fear. There are of course relationships between the security problem, the need for political development and the economic situation. The most pressing problem must, however, be the continuing violence. Bringing it to an end is our chief aim. Violence obviously brings individual tragedy, it heightens tension within Northern Ireland, it places a major constraint on political development and it inhibits investment and prosperity. So a vicious circle is created. The lack of political agreement within Northern Ireland adds to instability, and may well help the terrorists through hindering the growth of whole-hearted support for the security forces from each part of the community. Equally unemployment leads to enforced idleness and discontent, which can be exploited by the para-militaries. We have to seek progress on all these fronts if we are to secure the peace, stability and prosperity which we want for the people of Northern Ireland.

Faced with the tension and the tragedies caused by terrorism, some people, naturally enough are, tempted to look for short cuts in winning the battle. But in a free, open and democratic society such as ours, terrorism is best countered by the resolute application of the criminal law. We should maintain arrest-powers, court procedures and treatment in prison which are as standard as they can practicably be. That means that we should look to the police to charge terrorists and bring them before courts where independence cannot seriously be questioned, where the rules of evidence apply and where fundamental safeguards for defendants are maintained. To some to whom I have listened in the last three months it may seem paradoxical that terrorists are entitled to the protection of the judicial system which they are seeking to destroy; but I am convinced that in any democratic society that approach must be the right one. I think that it is also the only practical one, because anything else would, in the long run, produce the wrong result. If we departed from the rule of law we would leave a difficult but sure pathway and plunge into a morass in which it would be easy to sink. We would give the terrorists a line with which to rally formidable support in the Province, in the rest of Britain and abroad.

Security has undoubtedly improved since the grim days of the early 1970s. But to help the House to grasp the scale of the continuing violence in Northern Ireland, let me briefly mention some recent statistics. Since 1 July six members of the security forces and 11 civilians — Protestants and Catholics—have died in incidents arising from the security situation. In the five months following 1 July, 131 members of the security forces and 226 civilians were injured. Since 1 July there have been 105 shooting incidents and 53 explosions, and 17 explosive devices have been neutralised.

The House will see at once what those figures mean to the people involved and to their families and friends. During that period, we on this side of the water—and, indeed, in this House—have learnt vividly the realities of murder and bereavement.

Hon. Members may observe that I have not compared the figures with those of earlier periods. I would like to say a word about the handling of such figures. As the House knows, we publish the casualty figures twice a year in some detail, and we shall continue to do so: the House and our constituents are entitled to know how things stand. At present the figures show a continuing decline in most categories of violence and in the totals, and of course that is satisfactory as far as it goes. But my colleagues and I do not intend to generalise prematurely from that trend. For one thing, statistics bring no comfort to the bereaved or the injured. For another, we know that we are faced with a ruthless and sophisticated enemy who continues to have access to recruits, money, arms and explosives.

Security policy is not static. All the time we look for ways to deny that access, and to grind down the terrorists. Usually, we prefer not to speak about those ways. But I would be misleading the House if I fell into the temptation of predicting that the present relatively favourable trend would lead inevitably and without fluctuations to the ending of terrorism, which is our aim.

Before I turn to the provisions of the emergency legislation, I want to refer to the individuals and organisations who are charged with the responsibility for maintaining public order and enforcing the rule of law in Northern Ireland, within the framework established by the

Government and Parliament. In recent years, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has trebled in size and expanded its capabilities enormously. It is a tribute to the qualities of those in the force that that has been accomplished with the minimum of dislocation. We now have a highly competent, professional and resolute police force. The courage, dedication and sacrifice of the men and women who make up that force and its reserve place us greatly in their debt. I know that the chief constable and the police authority are determined to see that the force maintains the highest standards, and that its resources are effectively deployed to protect the community as a whole from terrorist attack and public disorder.

On Tuesday for the first time I "flew the border", to use a familiar phrase. When I met at each post soldiers who had served in Northern Ireland before, I asked them what was the main change which they had found since they had last been there. Almost all of them said it was the extended role of the RUC, and the way in which the police were now able to do work which had previously fallen to themselves as soldiers.

The establishment of police primacy, which has gone on under different Governments, is a thoroughly healthy development which we mean to maintain. We recognise that policing a divided community is a highly sensitive task, particularly when the police have at the same time to counter a vicious terrorist campaign supported by a sophisticated and insidious propaganda machine.

It would be silly for the Government, for me, or for anybody to suggest that all officers have responded to the many difficult situations that they have faced in exactly the right way at all times. From time to time individuals may lose their heads and mistakes can be made. But the same could be said for any police force anywhere in the world.

However, the record of the RUC shows that there is the will to enforce the law even-handedly and in the interests of the whole community. The police recognise more clearly than anyone that effective policing depends on their establishing links with the community and building a fund of trust and good will. Support has to be earned. It is a slow process, especially against the backdrop that I mentioned earlier. The police must maintain their efforts to win the confidence of the whole community. But it is not a one-sided business. The Government and political leaders on both sides of the community must work to remove the obstacles in the way of acceptance of the RUC as an impartial professional police force throughout the community.

In the violent campaign confronting them, the security forces at times have no option but to use force, sometimes using firearms or riot guns with plastic baton rounds. But let me make it absolutely clear that there is not a shoot-to-kill policy — nor would the Government countenance one.

When policemen and soldiers are faced with terrorists who are likely to be armed, or with dangerous riots, quick decisions have to be taken under intense pressure. However, all fatalities are fully investigated and reports go to the independent Director of Public Prosecutions who considers whether the force used was reasonable and whether there are grounds for prosecution. If there is a prosecution, it is right that the same safeguards — in particular the test of proof beyond reasonable doubt — should apply to members of the security forces as to other members of the community.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The Minister will appreciate that this point is especially sensitive. I realise that an inquiry is being made into the recent incident in Derry. But how do the security forces operate in stopping and shooting to kill a person when no warrant for his arrest has been issued—I refer to the reply that the Secretary of State gave me yesterday—and when he has not drawn arms? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that that leads many people to think that the policy is shoot to kill and not stop and arrest?

Mr. Hurd: As I said, the policy is not shoot to kill. The existence or non-existence of a warrant is, of course, only part of the story. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah".] Of course it is. I have explained exactly how the rule of law applies.

Much depends on the reasonable grounds for suspicion. But I shall not be drawn into commenting on the recent incident that the hon. Gentleman clearly has in mind. As I have said, all fatalities are investigated under the rule of law. The investigation of the two fatalities that the hon. Gentleman has in mind is proceeding, and it would be quite wrong for me to dwell on the matter.

Mr. John Hulme (Foyle): On the same crucial question whether the security forces have abandoned the rule of law and are pursuing a shoot-to-kill policy, and on the incident in my constituency, does the Secretary of State agree that the security forces clearly had considerable advance information as to the intentions of the two members of the IRA? That advance information should have given them plenty of time to take action other than execution — particularly that form of execution — had they been proceeding according to the rule of law.

Mr. Hurd: I am tempted, but I must resist the temptation, to question whether the hon. Gentleman's account is likely to be realistic. As I have said, an investigation——

Mr. McNamara: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: No. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman. I am now dealing with an understandable inquiry from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), in whose constituency these events occurred. Without endorsing or contradicting his statement of the events, which would be improper, I must tell him that under the rule of law, which is the framework within which we are discussing these matters, these deaths are being independently investigated. I believe that that is the right way, and it would be wrong for me as Secretary of State to comment further on what happened on that occasion.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman take it from me that all right-thinking people in Northern Ireland prefer IRA men rather than innocent people to be shot?

Mr. Hurd: That intervention confirms my prudence in not commenting further upon these events.

Fatalities are fully investigated and the reports go to the independent Director of Public Prosecutions, who considers whether the force used was reasonable. That is the principle, and it is being applied in this case.

Behind the police stands the Army, because military support is still required by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in certain areas of the Province and in certain operational situations. That support has been unswerving, and I am

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sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to the Army commanders and soldiers who have gone about their tasks bravely and shrewdly over the years.

An invaluable contribution has been made by the Ulster Defence Regiment, which, as I and other hon. Gentlemen have seen for ourselves, provides front-line support to the RUC in much of Northern Ireland. The Government and the people of Northern Ireland will continue to need its services.

The efforts of the security forces continue to show results. Since July, 237 terrorists have been charged with serious offences, including 41 for murder or attempted murder, and 80·5 kilogrammes of explosives, 87 weapons and 8,324 rounds of ammunition have been recovered.

I should like to mention also the men and women of the Northern Ireland prison service who have faced with courage and dedication large-scale protest action within the prisons and attacks upon them outside. They are not always remembered in this catalogue. Such attacks include the assassination earlier this year of an assistant governor at the Maze prison.

I should also mention the co-operation received from the security forces of the Republic of Ireland, among whom lives have been lost in the fight against the common enemy. The co-operation between us is crucial in bringing about the defeat of terrorism, and we must work to make it stronger.

Against that background, I turn to the specific measures and recommendations in Sir George Baker's report. The operations of security forces against terrorists, and the way in which the courts deal with cases of a terrorist nature, have been helped by the various emergency measures in the 1978 Act. The Act confers on the police and armed forces special powers of arrest, search and seizure. It also provides for trial without jury in certain specified classes of serious criminal offences, and imposes stricter-than-normal bail conditions in such cases. It contains other provisions intended to make it possible to bring terrorists to justice through the courts without unduly affecting their rights. The Act also contains provisions which would permit the detention without trial of suspected terrorists, although this power has not been used since 1975, and has not been in force since 1980.

Successive Parliaments and Governments have decided that these exceptional powers should be continued only for as long as necessary. I endorse that. Such powers should be available only to the extent that circumstances render them strictly necessary.

Having studied the position carefully, Sir George Baker concluded that there was a continuing need for emergency powers such as those in the Act. I agree. So indeed does the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, which after long and exhaustive studies of these problems reached a similar conclusion. We have undertaken a detailed scrutiny of the Act in the light of Sir George's report, and I believe that there is some scope for making changes which would reflect developments in the security situation and perhaps strike more precisely the right balance between individual liberties and the need to give the security forces and courts adequate powers to deal with terrorism.

I do not propose to go through Sir George's recommendations in sequence; I shall, however, set out my views in general terms as the starting point for the debate. I have taken no final decisions; I wish to take careful note of what is said today, to weigh hon. Members' points and then to decide what changes in the law I should submit to the House when there is an opportunity to do so. I have sought and received comments on the Act and the review from many people and organisations in the Province—for example, I have had correspondence with the chairman of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, whom I hope to meet to discuss these and other matters soon.

A number of Sir George's recommendations aim to bring the emergency provisions more closely in line with the ordinary law of Northern Ireland. In general I regard those recommendations sympathetically and I propose to carry them through, except for a few subsidiary recommendations which would cause undue practical difficulties and be of little benefit. Thus, I am inclined to accept Sir George Baker's recommendation for the rationalisation of police arrest powers. I have noted the declining use of the arrest powers at present possessed by the Armed Forces and Sir George's recommendation that in the light of that there should be some additional refinements to the powers. That will need to be very carefully considered, taking into account the principles and practical implications. I subscribe, too, to the principles that underlie Sir George's recommendations for increasing the scope of the Attorney-General's discretion to certify particular offences out of the scheduled, non-jury mode of trial. I am inclined to adopt most of those recommendations in that respect. However, I want to examine rather more closely the list of offences that Sir George suggests might be triable by jury in an increased number of cases.

Sir George makes a number of other recommendations designed to rationalise the emergency provisions in areas where the practices and operational needs of the security forces and the courts have moved some way since the Act was last amended. His recommendations on bail and on the admissibility of statements are good examples of that category. In each instance, the practice of the courts is somewhat different from what a superficial reading of sections 2 and 8 of the Act might suggest. Sir George endorses current practice but makes recommendations to bring the wording of the statute more closely into line with the way in which the intentions of Parliament have been interpreted by the courts. Specifically, he recommends that the Act be revised to make it clear that the onus to show reason why bail should not be granted lies upon the prosecution. In respect of admissions, Sir George suggests that an amendment to the Act might endorse what is already the well-established practice of the courts, namely, that admissions by accused persons should not be admissible as evidence when there is reason to suppose that they have been extorted by violence or by the threat of violence.

I am not sure that either of those essentially cosmetic changes to the law is strictly necessary. The way in which the courts have hitherto chosen to interpret the law is satisfactory and is endorsed by Sir George. However, I shall listen carefully to the points made in the debate before reaching a final conclusion on that.

One of the most important questions raised by Sir George is whether there is a continuing need for the detention provisions that are still contained, although no longer in force, in the 1978 Act. At present, I could bring those powers into immediate effect by order, which would

then have to be approved within 40 days by resolution of each House. I have thought hard about that and I should like to explain my views. Clearly, there are political attractions in complete repeal; we have come a long way since 1975 when detention was last used. I can think of no circumstances in which detention without trial would be sensible or justifiable as a settled long-term policy. The opposition that it would stir up would quickly outweigh the benefits that it could bring. Detention runs counter to the traditional concept of the rule of law.

However, one cannot exclude a sudden short-term crisis, which might occur when Parliament was in recess. It could then be difficult to secure the new primary legislation which would be needed to introduce detention in an emergency if the present powers were repealed. I would welcome the views of the House. I am tempted to repeal, but on the whole my present inclination is that it would not be prudent to deprive myself or my successors of a reserve power which I certainly hope may never be used. A similar power is of course retained in the Republic of Ireland.

A number of Sir George's recommendations arise from his concern that delays in the judicial process should be kept to a minimum. I share that concern. I shall watch with interest the field trials announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to be conducted in England and Wales into the practicability and effectiveness of time limits. I am keeping in close touch with the Attorney-General and the Lord Chancellor on this matter, and we shall do what we can to reduce waiting times. I know that the prosecuting authorities and the courts service have done their utmost to reduce waiting times between remand and trial and will continue to do so. In particular, I am pleased to be able to announce that the Lord Chancellor has agreed to the appointment of an additional county court judge. However, it must be said that delays can often occur at the request of the accused, in particular when the services of a particular defence counsel are awaited. We would face the greatest difficulty in restricting this freedom of choice. I take Sir George's point that we could, perhaps, increase our flexibility by allowing trials of scheduled offences to be held at courts other than the Crown court in Belfast. We must take careful account of all the security implications of this proposal.

This brings me naturally to Sir George's comments on the use of accomplice evidence, with which he dealt at length.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will my right hon. Friend comment briefly on the recommendation in the report by Sir George Baker relating to the length of time that someone may be held before trial? I think that he makes the recommendation that if the delay should exceed 12 months, the individual should be set free.

Mr. Hurd: I have said that I am worried about those delays. They are related to the practice of granting bail and to the choice of counsel. I am watching the trials taking place this side of the water to see to what extent—while not exactly imitating the Scottish law—delays can be reduced by setting time limits. I should welcome views on this as it is an area of genuine concern shared by everyone—police, judiciary and elected representatives in the Province. However, it bristles with practical difficulties.

I move on to the use of accomplice evidence. Sir George affirmed that the use of such evidence in no way deprived the accused of a fair trial. He pointed out that, following any conviction in a non-jury trial, the judge had to set out his reasoning, which is not the case with a jury. The question of accomplice evidence is of course topical following the recent case based on the evidence of Raymond Gilmour. I do not wish to comment on that particular case. But I want to remind the House of part of the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General in answer to a written question on 24 October last year:

> "In Northern Ireland terrorist crime is a serious problem and the full extent of the involvement of many of the terrorists is perhaps known only to those engaged with them in their criminal activities.
>
> When one of those who has been involved in terrorism and is thus an accomplice indicates his willingness to give evidence about crimes of which he knows and in which he may have been a participant, it is the duty of the chief constable to put the full facts before the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is then the duty of the director to consider all the evidence and information before him with a view to the initiation of criminal proceedings."
> —[*Official Report*, 24 October 1983; Vol. 47, c. *3-4*.]

My right hon. and learned Friend then explained that, where the evidence appears to be credible and cogent and relates to serious terrorist crime, there is an overriding public interest in having charges brought before the court, and it is the Director's clear duty to see that this happens. It is then for the court to determine whether the evidence of the accomplice is so convincing as to its content and so reliable in itself that it reaches the standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt. In the Gilmour case obviously the court of the Lord Chief Justice came to the conclusion that it did not.

That is a clear statement by which I stand. There is no reason to reject in principle evidence simply because it comes from an accomplice who has given information to the police. The Lord Chief Justice made that clear in his remarks on the Gilmour case. But that evidence then has to be weighed in the scales of justice. If a court rejects accomplice evidence in a particular case, it does not mean that the decision to prosecute was wrong, any more than acquittal in a case involving a member of the security forces means that the case should never have been brought. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) made a similar point yesterday. It is a question of testing available evidence in open court, and the Director's decision to proceed in each case is taken in full consciousness of his responsibility for the independent, impartial discharge of the duties of his office.

On a connected point, Sir George Baker suggested that efforts be made to reduce the number of defendants to 20 or less in trials involving accomplice evidence. There have been very few cases involving more than 20 defendants. While the Government will clearly look very closely at this issue, I am not so far convinced that trying a number of defendants simultaneously affects the standard of justice or causes undue delay. Indeed, I could imagine longer delays for some accused, if different batches were brought to trial separately.

Sir George also dealt with the composition of the court before which scheduled offences are tried, and he endorsed the present use of a single judge to try cases where there is terrorist involvement. Underlying these conclusions in the report are substantial arguments both of principle, in terms of workability and the standard of justice which might be provided by a multiple judge court, and of resources. If we are to make progress in reducing delay, we have to make the very best use of the judicial

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resources available to us. Of course someone convicted before a single judge has the right of an appeal court, normally of three judges.

Mr. McNamara: I have been trying to follow the track of the right hon. Gentleman's argument, particularly when he seemed to endorse the comments of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) on the recent trial. Is the Secretary of State therefore prepared to say that it will now be policy in his Department that accomplices —supergrasses—will not be granted remission for any crimes for which they admit they are guilty, that there will be no monetary rewards, that they will not be settled in foreign lands, that they will not be taken on expensive holidays to Cyprus and elsewhere and that one can now trust the odd supergrass as opposed to the generality of supergrasses? Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the manner in which supergrasses are being used is bringing the whole system into even further disrepute?

Mr. Hurd: If the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may have a chance to develop that theme. The inducements and immunities which may be offered in a particular case are revealed to the defence. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to develop this point, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will take it up when he replies to the debate.

I think that I have made clear the basis on which we believe it is right that evidence which is available and relevant should be available to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Where he decides, using his usual standards, that it provides a basis for prosecution, the prosecution should proceed. It is then for the court—we are dealing here all the time with the rule of law—to weigh the evidence that has been produced in the light of all the circumstances that have to be revealed to it. That is a perfectly fair and, indeed, the only sensible manner in which to treat this aspect.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland is in an unusually bad position to judge whether, to use the Secretary of State's words, the evidence of the supergrass is credible and cogent, because the DPP does not interview witnesses in any way? I understand that all he is presented with is statements by the witnesses and opinions formed by police officers and others of those statements. Does he not agree that if there are to be trials based on the evidence of supergrasses a new procedure must be introduced whereby, at a preliminary stage and before charges are brought, proper procedures are followed to assess, having seen the witness, whether he is credible and cogent?

Mr. Hurd: I do not see the need for that. We have a perfectly normal and defensible procedure—the police, the independent Director of Public Prosecutions, and then the court, who are in full possession of the facts. That procedure works well, sometimes to the satisfaction of one party and sometimes to the satisfaction of another. I do not believe that a case has been made out for changing it.

I shall move on to the next point, which is the question of the Diplock single-judge court. It will not come as any great surprise to the House when I say that I cannot see at present any way that we could, in the circumstances, return to jury trials for the worst offences of terrorism in Northern Ireland. But that in no way precludes progress in taking an increased proportion of trials out of the scheduled non-jury procedure by means of the certificate issued by the Attorney-General, to which I referred earlier.

Finally, Sir George dealt at some length with the police complaints procedure. He was right to do so. A clear and trusted system for handling complaints against the police is an important safeguard for the citizen, and indeed in the long run for the police. This is particularly important where the RUC is having to police a divided community. It is too easy for complaints that are not properly made or investigated to fester or be used for propaganda purposes by those whose aim is not justice but the discrediting of the police.

By fortunate coincidence the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is bringing about a substantial reform in England and Wales. There is a new police complaints authority which has the new duty of supervising the investigation of complaints against the police. The independent element thus comes into play at an earlier and crucial stage. I am carefully considering and consulting interested parties to find the best way of introducing similar changes in Northern Ireland. If we can find the right procedures and the right people to work them, this could be a big step forward.

At the heart of this question lies an unbalanced proposition that the House must face. The security forces and the Government are bound by the law, and the terrorists are not. There is a price to pay for that lack of balance. I hope that hon. Members will accept that it means that a soldier or a police officer sometimes finds himself in peril of the courts over the degree of force used in operations against terrorists who know no such constraint. It means that terrorists can walk free if their friends can intimidate key witnesses. It means that terrorists can walk free once they have completed their sentences, even though the security forces and their neighbours may have reason to suppose that they are returning to their old ways. Those are facts and there is no sense in attempting to disguise them.

Voices are sometimes raised in the Province against that imbalance. It is sometimes argued that those who struggle against lawlessness should be freed in some way from the constraints of the law. As I indicated earlier, I am sure that that would be wrong. Nothing would do more to increase support for the terrorists in the Province and abroad than a suspension by us of the rule of law, or a failure by us to understand the importance of individual liberty and decent behaviour.

We are determined to support the security forces, the prison service, and the judiciary, both with the necessary resources and with our voices. They all in different ways serve as champions of the people of Northern Ireland, of their human rights and of their liberty to go peaceably about their daily lives. In turn those servants of the public suffer ferocious propaganda attacks. A mistake, a momentary misjudgment by an individual, alleged or actual, is exaggerated and turned against the institution as a whole.

Right hon. and hon. Members are rightly jealous of the duty of this House to protect individual rights. They rightly probe the details of individual cases, and no Secretary of State should resent such zeal. We must ensure that proven instances of wrong-doing do not go unpunished, but I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will understand the

danger of endorsing the propaganda campaigns of those who are interested not in the liberty of the individual but in the discrediting and overthrow of the institutions of the rule of law. The dupes of Sinn Fein campaigns are no friends of freedom in Northern Ireland.

In return, the House and the people of Northern Ireland can require something of the Government. We must make sure that the rule of law is a reality and that the differences in Northern Ireland law intended to take account of the different circumstances of the Province are kept to the minimum. We must make sure that where there are complaints, there is the machinery for dealing with these complaints as quickly and fairly as possible. We must make sure that the institutions of the Province are so designed, administered and staffed that they serve and are seen to serve the genuine interests of all those who live within the Province. I can give the House the assurance that we are working diligently to that end, and I commend this motion to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

5.22 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'regrets the Government's delay in responding to the Report of Sir George Baker; and affirms that law and order are best served by methods of law enforcement which are seen to be fair, compassionate and non-discriminatory.'.

This debate is long-awaited and long-promised. In our discussion on the renewal of the Emergency Provisions Act on 5 July, I traced the history of the calls that had been made in this House since 1979 for a review of the Act. On 22 July 1982, the then Secretary of State finally responded to those calls with an announcement that there was to be a review. There was a further nine-month delay before he announced who was to undertake it. Then the general election caused a further delay.

Sir George Baker reported in March this year, about nine months after he began work. There was no delay on his part. That is a tribute to his enthusiasm for his task and for his appreciation of the urgency of the matter. In that time, he listened with his customary courtesy and attention to all those with something to say. He produced a careful and thoughtful report. It did not compel universal agreement. We on the Opposition Benches do not endorse all that he said—I shall elaborate upon that later—but it deserved better than it has received at the hands of the Government.

We tried to exercise patience. We did not expect a debate at once. We hoped that the Government would read the report and consider it carefully, but as month succeeded month we began to wonder whether perhaps the Government were slow readers. On 24 May I asked the then Secretary of State whether he would discuss the possibility of a debate with the Leader of the House. He replied:

"I regard Sir George Baker's report as an important document that the House will wish to debate. I hope that in due course time will be made available for such a debate".—[*Official Report*, 24 May 1984; Vol. 60, c. 1235.]

On 28 June, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), he said:

"All these matters will be relevant to next week's debate and perhaps to a discussion of the Baker report in due course."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1149.]

On 26 July I asked him again and he said:

"I expect this item will come up for debate soon after we return. It is a matter for the Leader of the House but I believe that that is the understanding."—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1984; Vol. 64, c. 1224.]

On 29 November, I asked the Secretary of State again, and he replied:

"Obviously, it is for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to say when the debate will take place. I hope that that debate will not be delayed too long."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 1075.]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, arise; the long, long night is over; we have our debate. And, would you believe it, the Government have provided a debate on the Thursday before Christmas — the day before the House is adjourned, in a week when, as no doubt the Government hoped, the House was to be occupied with uncontentious business, and when hon. Members would wish to be in their constituencies for various Christmas events connected with the elderly, the handicapped, and other local groups.

Mr. Hurd: The House is sitting.

Mr. Archer: The House is sitting, as the right hon. Gentleman says. If the House had not been sitting, no doubt we should not have had our debate at all.

However, the week has not worked out quite as the Government expected. Indeed, few things these days seem to work out quite as the Government expect. But the debate is not as well attended as it would have been if the Government's business managers had accorded it a higher priority. If the people of Northern Ireland are told that the attendance is thin, it is an indication not of how seriously hon. Members take Northern Ireland business, but of how seriously the Government take it.

I do not say that as a personal criticism of the Secretary of State. He does not arrange the business of the House. He cannot insist on a higher priority for his subject than the Government as a whole are willing to accord it. But if the Government cared, they had no better opportunity to demonstrate their concern than by providing a debate in prime time. Now we know the rating of Northern Ireland business in the Government's book.

Of course, the Government's response to the report is the responsibility of the Secretary of State. It is a poor thing, but it is his own. I cannot help feeling that the House will be left with a feeling of profound disappointment. Of course, the right hon. Gentleman paid tribute to Sir George Baker, as we would expect. The debate on 5 July enabled his predecessor and myself to offer a personal tribute to Sir George who, unhappily, did not live to hear this debate.

This is not the occasion to repeat all that I said at that time, but this commission was a fitting conclusion to a lifetime of distinguished public service by a man who numbered among his many qualities the capacity to listen and to assess what he heard as objectively and fairly as possible—a quality not universally shared among people concerned with Northern Ireland. Sir George was in the tradition of distinguished judges who have reported on various aspects of the situation in Northern Ireland. If I find that I differ from his conclusions, I nevertheless recognise the mark of a seeker after truth. He did not make recommendations lightly. His proposals were restrained —some of us believe that they were too restrained—but

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they were proposals that the Government could have accepted at once, without opening any floodgates or imposing any danger for security.

There are many people in Northern Ireland who are anxious to know the Government's reactions and to be assured that the Government appreciate the strength of feeling on the subject. The Secretary of State, very fairly, emphasised the need to preserve the standards of the criminal law. He announced that the Government had consulted widely on the recommendations, although I am not wholly clear of the need for that, because Sir George himself had already consulted. He said that he was disposed in favour of some — most, I think — of the recommendations, but that he wished to reflect further. As I understand it, he said that there will not be any legislation on the subject in this Session. That response—I say this without any joy—is not only bland and unimaginative, but uncomprehending and incomprehensible.

To set the Opposition's position in context, I hope the House will forgive me if I repeat some of what I said on 5 July. First, we have no sympathy with lawlessness. We believe that any political cause, worthy or unworthy, is degraded and distorted when it is pursued by individuals who take upon themselves the right to deal with opposition by killing or terrorising those who disagree with them. In particular, we denounce the indiscriminate violence that kills and maims without distinction all those who happen to be in a particular place at a particular time. That has been said by us so often that there is no need to elaborate.

Secondly, we appreciate the difficult task of those who have to enforce law and order. We do not underestimate the extent of the tragedies brought about by violence. We appreciate the dangerous conditions in which they work and the necessity for taking decisions quickly under pressure.

I echo the Secretary of State's tribute to the police force. As he said, the police are not universally without blame, and to suggest that they are all perfect would be as silly as suggesting that they are all petty tyrants devoid of any redeeming features. But they are entitled to ask that we bear in mind their difficulties when we discuss these matters.

Opposition Members believe that the strongest base from which to maintain law and order is a community which supports law enforcement and opposes law-breaking. That is achieved by demonstrating that those concerned with law enforcement display constant respect for the rules and that those rules are manifestly fair. Law-breakers cannot be dealt with by risking injustice to those who are innocent, and the myth that is spread by many law-breakers—that they are engaged in a war—cannot be destroyed by encouraging the authorities to adopt the slogans of war — such as "Shoot on Sight" — or the practices of war by claiming to identify the enemy before he has been convicted.

We believe it would have been better if Sir George's terms of reference had not begun with the words,

"Accepting that temporary emergency powers are necessary".

When someone is appointed to conduct an inquiry, it is better not to begin by telling him what his conclusions are to be. The question is about what departures from normality are necessary. If they are not necessary, they are counter-productive and if they are not required to protect, they serve only to alienate.

In that context I turn to the question of trial without jury. That procedure singles out Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. In Great Britain the right to trial by jury is a long established and cherished safeguard for any individual who is accused of a criminal offence. Attempts to curtail that safeguard, even marginally, are properly resisted. In Northern Ireland the right to jury trial has been curtailed for 11 years.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill in 1973. I have recently read some of the proceedings to remind myself of how the position appeared at that time. According to the Government of the day, people were being acquitted who, because they were guilty, should not have been acquitted and it was said that those people were terrorists. The Opposition agreed that if that was the case it was unacceptable. Our position was that, fundamental as the right to jury trial is, it is not totally inviolate in all circumstances. We said that, if people who were guilty were being acquitted, there should be concern. But we also said that if the Government sought to curtail that position the onus was upon them to establish that major terrorists were escaping conviction and that they were likely to be convicted by a different form of tribunal. We said that, to justify the introduction of the Diplock procedure, the Government should establish first that the conviction rate was too low under the jury system. I recollect that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said that that was inconsistent with what had been said shortly before the debate by the then Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had spoken of arrests that had been made since the beginning of the year and said in May of that year that

"since the beginning of the year . . . there were 157 convictions for specific criminal offences relating to terrorism."

He added:

"These figures speak for themselves." — [*Official Report*, 28 March 1973; Vol 853, c. 1323.]—

and Opposition Members agreed with him.

It has not always been the Government's own case that the conviction rate was too low under the jury system. The Opposition said that, even if that was established, the Government would have to show that if the conviction rate was increased under the Diplock procedure the right people would be convicted. It is no answer to terrorism to risk convicting innocent people. The Opposition asked the Government to produce their evidence. They said that terrorists were probably escaping conviction for two reasons that had been discussed by the Diplock committee in chapter 5 of its report. They said that the Diplock committee had considered the possibility that jurors had been or would be intimidated. They did not cite any instances of intimidation, but believed that that might be happening. As evidence of the need to deny jury trial to accused people, that seemed less than persuasive. The committee considered the danger of partisan juries. It pointed out that juries were composed predominantly of Loyalists, because of the property qualification then in operation. It said that it was not greatly troubled by the possibility of perverse convictions of Nationalists, as it believed that that practice could be avoided by a fair judge, but it was more troubled about perverse acquittals, which also troubled the Government of the day. That could only mean perverse acquittals of Protestant paramilitaries, which was what the debates in 1973 were predominantly about. My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and my hon. Friend the Member

for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) were both members of the Committee, and there are other right hon. and hon. Members who will remember the debates.

Those, in essence, were the arguments of the Diplock committee and the Government of the day for introducing the Diplock procedure. The Diplock committee actually said:

"It is fair to say that we have not had our attention drawn to complaints of convictions that were plainly perverse and complaints of acquittals which were plainly perverse are rare".

On Second Reading the Opposition officially abstained because we wanted to hear the Government's arguments in greater detail in Committee. We declared that we were not persuaded that the Government had made out their case for containing jury trials. I believe that we were right.

It is true that, when the Diplock procedure had been operating for a few years, I heard from people in both traditions that our anxieties had perhaps not materialised. There were few reports, if any, that the Diplock judges were convicting in cases where a reasonable jury might be expected to acquit. Indeed, there were some cases the other way. Of course, that might be another way of saying that the Diplock procedure had not achieved its stated objective to increase the conviction rate. But at least there were no complaints at that time of unfair convictions. As there seemed little evidence of dissatisfaction——

Mr. McNamara: There were many complaints about unfair convictions, particularly when people were being convicted on old, uncorroborated confessions which might have been obtained by violence or threats of violence, though less than torture or degrading or inhuman treatment. I shall develop the point later.

Mr. Archer: I wonder whether my hon. Friend and I are speaking about different periods. I am speaking about the period immediately after the Diplock procedure was introduced. If he heard complaints during that period, I am bound to say that they escaped me. Either of us could be right or wrong. I am explaining only why during that period I at least did not call for an end to the Diplock procedure. I believe that the situation has changed in the past two or three years. There have been reports of convictions which some at least profess to find surprising. I was not present at those trials, and I have not had an opportunity to read the transcripts, so I do not presume to make a judgment. I say only that there were such reports, and they coincided with the substantial fall in the acquittal rate in the Diplock trials. That rate was 57 per cent. in 1973. By 1979 it had fallen to 35 per cent. and by 1981 to 33 per cent.—all at a time when the acquittal rate in jury trials in Northern Ireland increased substantially. So the Diplock procedure was achieving its stated purpose of producing more convictions, but there were doubts whether they were merited convictions.

Sir George Baker discussed whether the judges might be becoming case-hardened. If that is said, it should not be construed as in any way offensive to the judiciary. It is because that process is virtually inevitable that trial by jury has been considered an essential safeguard of individual liberty for so long. Sir George said that he found that the judges themselves were very mindful of the danger, which does not necessarily mean that it neutralises the danger. Admittedly, it may be more difficult to sustain the suggestion as applicable to all judges, after the outcome of the Gilmour trial.

I have been driven to conclude that the time may have come to restore for all offences the trial method which was normal until 11 years ago. If there is then a spate of clearly perverse acquittals, we may have to think again, but it would be an important contribution to persuading people in both traditions that the Government recognise the widespread feeling that civil liberties in Northern Ireland have been steadily eroded over the past few years, and that they were prepared to consider the whole situation with an open mind.

But perhaps we can make the experiment on a more limited scale among some of the offences which are now scheduled. Sir George Baker did not go as far as that, but he recommended, in paragraphs 130 to 151, that there should be a much wider discretion in the Attorney-General to certify out of the schedule. That seems to me to be a step—albeit a hesitant one—in the right direction.

A robbery, an aggravated burglary, need not necessarily be associated in any way with terrorism. It may be carried out purely for purposes of good old-fashioned selfishness. In his study for the Cobden Trust, Mr. Dermot Walsh found that 40 per cent. of those tried by the Diplock procedure had no observable connection with terrorism.

I note that in paragraph 151 Sir George suggested that if it was thought that his proposals were too radical a judge could be given power, where there had been any attempt to intimidate or interfere with a jury, to discharge that jury and continue the trial sitting alone. That would be a possible safeguard if the Government decided to be even more radical and to begin all trials as jury trials.

On Tuesday, the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights made public some of its recommendations to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): My right hon. and learned Friend raised a point a moment ago on which I have been reflecting as it has an important bearing on what I want to say later. He said that 40 per cent. had not, observably, been involved in terrorism. On what basis were the accused dealt with under the Diplock procedure, which is based on that section of the Act defining terrorism, when it is claimed—or, if it is the other way round, when the prosecution claim—that they were involved in terrorism? How does that 40 per cent. arise?

Mr. Archer: They were brought before the courts because they were accused of the specific offences in the schedule. Anyone accused of those offences is, normally, brought before the courts under the Diplock procedure.

Mr. Rees: All the bank robbers?

Mr. Archer: As my right hon. Friend says, all the bank robbers. Yes, that is the position.

As I was saying, the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights has concluded that it is not yet possible to return to jury trial in all cases, contrary to the suggestion that I made a few moments ago. But it recommends a substantial reduction in the number of scheduled offences and enlarging the power to certify out. I am pleased to learn that the Minister is at least considering those proposals sympathetically, as I understood him.

Contrary to Sir George Baker's recommendation, the committee also proposes that, where jury trial is not used, the judge sitting alone should be replaced by a bench of three judges. When the Minister winds up, perhaps he will give us the Government's reactions to those suggestions.

[Mr. Archer]

The second matter considered by Sir George Baker was the length of time during which people in custody await trial, particularly those awaiting trial under the Diplock procedure. The Cobden Trust found that, in 1981, 60 per cent. of those they studied had been on remand for more than nine months before being sentenced and almost 10 per cent. for more than 15 months. The problem is particularly acute in relation to those awaiting trial on the evidence of supergrasses.

Most of the defendants discharged by the Lord Chief Justice this week in the Gilmour trial had been in custody since August 1982. We have heard of a number of cases where someone being held in custody awaiting trial on supergrass evidence has been told that the prosecution was not proceeding. Then, almost before the news has time to sink in, he has been rearrested to await trial on the evidence of a different supergrass.

In our last debate, I cited a letter which I had received from a lady who said that her son had been arrested and rearrested on the evidence of five successive supergrasses. She added:

"My son has been held since February 1982 and has been told that he will not get a trial until '85 or '86."

I understand that that young man is still in custody, awaiting trial in 1985 or 1986. Last month his application for bail was considered by the Lord Chief Justice, who said that he was unable to grant bail on the present criteria, and is reported as saying that it is not the courts who make policy, nor could they override the law. That, of course, is a matter for the Secretary of State.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman realise and agree that the time that that young man has spent in custody — bearing in mind the provisions for remission in Northern Ireland prisons—is virtually the equivalent of a six-year prison sentence?

Mr. Archer: I am most grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for pointing that out, as it is certainly true. At the risk of pointing out the obvious, the young man has not been convicted of any offence. There is no question about whether the court would have imposed a custodial sentence because he has not been convicted of any offence. He may be guilty, or he may be wholly innocent. We shall not know until he is tried. If he is acquitted, he will have spent the equivalent of a six-year sentence in custody—not because he has committed an offence, but because someone has alleged that he has committed an offence.

There are two ways of approaching the problem. We can reduce the delays in bringing cases to trial. We can try to ensure meanwhile that those awaiting trial are given bail unless there are considerations which fully justify keeping them in custody unconvicted. Those approaches are not mutually exclusive. We can and we should be examining both.

Sir George Baker addressed himself to both approaches in paragraphs 173 to 187. He considered the delays in bringing cases to trial, particularly the supergrass trials. He made a number of recommendations, which I hope that the authorities will consider. I was pleased to learn today from the Secretary of State that the Lord Chancellor has approved the appointment of a further judge.

Sir George made two proposals on bail. In paragraph 81 he recommended that section 2(2) should be redrafted to provide that the onus of showing why bail is not granted should be on the prosecution, if they object to it, with a wide discretion available to the judge. As I understood it, the right hon. Gentleman said that we do not need to do that because the courts already consider bail in that way. If they already approach bail in that way, why not amend the statute book to accord with reality?

In paragraph 185, Sir George Baker proposed that any prisoner who has been in custody for more than 12 months should be entitled to bail as of right. That seems a moderate enough proposal. I hope that the Government will implement it. They cannot justify allowing this situation to drag on as though it did not matter. In a country that boasts of its freedom, that situation is quite unacceptable.

Time will not permit me to consider in detail all the recommendations by Sir George. He referred to section 8 of the Act. Subsection (2) provides that confessions by an accused shall be excluded if they are adduced by torture or inhuman or degrading treatment. There is nothing in that provision about abuse, threats, keeping someone in custody hour after hour or refusing him access to a solicitor. Detention in conditions falling short of inhuman or degrading treatment is not excluded. What is wrong with the test which applies in England and Wales, that confessions are to be excluded unless they are made voluntarily? Sir George recommended a somewhat lower standard. He proposed that the section should be redrafted at least to exclude cases where a confession is adduced by violence or the threat of violence. I hope that we shall hear in the course of this debate how the Government react to that.

Section 12 provides for detention without trial. That has been discontinued since 1975, as the Secretary of State said. Sir George recommended that, as section 12 is not used and ought not to be used, it should be repealed. He made that recommendation "without qualification".

The right hon. Gentleman says that he does not like section 12. He says that there is no evidence of the need for such powers, but that he would like to leave section 12 on the statute book in case one day the situation might justify it. That is not the proper approach to emergency powers. Emergency powers in a civilised country should not outlive the emergency which brought them into being.

Then what becomes of the power of arrest under section 11? It is clear from the Act that the power under section 11 was intended to be a prelude to detention under section 12. There is no need to provide a power of arrest for other purposes. It already exists under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. If use is no longer to be made of section 12, what is the purpose of section 11? Sir George recommended that the powers of arrest under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act should be brought together under one Act. He looked at section 11 which provides that:

"Any constable may arrest without warrant any person whom he suspects of being a terrorist."

He concluded that the power was too wide. The Act says nothing about the grounds of the constable's suspicion. There may be no grounds for it; it may be wholly unreasonable. He recommended that any power to arrest without warrant should be expressed to be where the constable "reasonably so suspects", leaving the court to decide objectively whether the suspicion was reasonable.

The Cobden Trust survey found that 90 per cent. of those arrested under emergency legislation failed in the

end to be the subject of any charges, and that 72 per cent. of those held under such legislation were not even questioned about specific offences. The Trust asked whether those powers were not used just for the purpose of a general information-gathering exercise. We are all in favour of the police gathering information, but that it should be done by arresting and holding people about whom there is no reasonable suspicion is entirely unacceptable.

The European Convention on Human Rights provides, in article 5, that no one shall be deprived of his liberty unless lawfully arrested and detained

"for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable suspicion of having committed an offence".

The Government apparently believe that all their practices in Northern Ireland are fully consistent with the European convention, since in August they withdrew their notices of derogation from the United Kingdom's obligations in respect of Northern Ireland.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice has been in communication with the Home Secretary asking him to explain how the Government reconcile article 5 with either the wording or the use being made of section 11. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that this is not something which can be left until the next legislative Session. It is a matter on which we are already in breach of our international obligations under the European convention.

A further matter in which we have found ourselves unable to share Sir George's conclusions relates to the supergrass trials. I gave my view on that in the debate on 5 July, and in the interests of brevity I shall not now elaborate on the subject. But it has caused great anxiety, and may indeed be the most important single factor in the widespread feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction—I shall avoid the word "alienation" if the Prime Minister does not like it—with the administration of justice in Northern Ireland.

I do not say that prosecutors should never rely on accomplice evidence. That is a characteristic of most jurisdictions. But aspects of its use in Northern Ireland in the past few years have given rise, rightly I believe, to serious anxieties. First, there are the numbers of people tried together on one indictment. I realise, as the Secretary of State told us, that the police are anxious to avoid the delays involved in a succession of trials. But I do not believe that it is possible to try a vast concourse of people on one indictment without the risk that someone may be tainted by a piece of evidence which in logic is not relevant to his case.

Sir George Baker recommended that indictments be confined to a maximum of 20 defendants. That figure is startling enough, and I hoped that the authorities would consider it too high. Any lawyers in the House would surely agree with me. But the Gilmour trial before the Lord Chief Justice, which ended on Tuesday, involved 35 defendants. Whatever other considerations may have led to their acquittal, I do not believe that it can be right to prosecute such a number on one indictment.

Secondly, for reasons which are well known, an accomplice may have an incentive to falsify his account. In England and Wales a judge will emphasise that danger to the jury, and will warn them that they should be very reluctant to convict on the evidence of an accomplice in the absence of corroboration. But we are speaking, for the moment at least, of trials without a jury. However conscientiously a judge may try to keep that principle in mind, the effect cannot be the same as when a jury hears it from the lips of a judge.

Thirdly, it is of great importance that an accomplice who gives evidence should have nothing to hope for and nothing to fear from telling the truth. I say nothing about the considerations which were ventilated in an intervention earlier today by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, but if the accomplice is to be given immunity from prosecution, that should be made clear before he gives evidence, and it should be in no way conditional on the evidence which he gives. If he is not to be given immunity, he should be tried and sentenced before he gives evidence. We all agree on that; so far as I know, it is not in dispute. But the time that the person in question has to serve is still largely under the control of the authorities, and nothing can be done to eliminate that element.

When it is announced that someone who has given evidence as an informer is to be released substantially earlier than would usually be expected, inevitably public confidence in the fairness of the system will be jeopardised. I believe that if supergrass trials were discontinued, the gain in terms of restoring confidence among the community would substantially outweigh the possibility of convicting some people against whom there is no other evidence.

It is not a matter for the police; if they have reason to suspect someone, they must bring their evidence to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is not a matter for the director. If he has admissible evidence about which it is reasonable to project a conviction, it is difficult to see why he should not place it before a court. It is not a matter for the judges. If evidence is brought before them, they can only consider it on its merits in an individual case. I believe that the time has come for the Government to introduce legislation providing that no one may be convicted on the evidence of an accomplice in the absence of corroboration. Of course the comments of the Lord Chief Justice in the Gilmour case are welcome, and we await the judgment on the appeal in the Bennett case, which I understand will be delivered next week. But the remedy is in the hands of the Government.

I hope that when he replies the Minister will have something to say on another matter which has been ventilated today and which I believe makes a great contribution to the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. If people are to feel an obligation to observe the law, they must have a sense of assurance that the law is not only something which constrains them but something which protects them. That entails those charged with enforcing the law being seen to observe the legal limits on their powers.

In its ninth annual report, the Standing Advisory Committee says that the law governing the circumstances in which members of the security forces may fire weapons is

"one of the most controversial aspects of the security situation in recent years."

Of course those forces operate in conditions of great danger, and sometimes their members have to make decisions at a moment's notice when they cannot be sure of all the facts. It is right that all those considerations should be taken into account when assessing responsibility for the death of a civilian at the hands of the security

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forces. This is not a matter which is central to the discussion on the Baker report, and I might be out of order if I were to pursue it at great length today.

I commend to the Secretary of State the suggestion of the Standing Advisory Committee that when a case involving the killing of a civilian has been investigated, so far as possible the facts should be made known to the public. That does not happen when they have been considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and properly so; the director cannot make public his investigations. But a wall of silence is bound to breed suspicion. Then the commission suggests that the yellow card rules should be published and made available to the public. It also proposes a review of the whole law relating to the use of force by the security services.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice suggests examining the rules governing coroners' inquests so that there may be a feeling that the real issues have been investigated. There is great concern about this matter, and we will pursue it; ignoring it will not mean that it will go away.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): I have listened for almost half an hour to the right hon. and learned Gentleman expressing, quite properly, concern for people in Northern Ireland who may be innocent. However, in his consideration for their civil liberties, he is clearly making it more difficult for the security forces to deal with terrorism; no doubt that is a factor which he has thought about. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give some indication of what consolation I can offer my constituents and of whether I can tell them that a real effort is being made to protect them in the next 12 months, when no doubt another 50 or even 100 people will be killed by terrorists? As well as concerning himself with the civil liberties and rights of potentially innocent people, will he also consider ways of defending the basic civil right of all people in Northern Ireland—the right to life?

Mr. Archer: Perhaps I have not made myself as clear as I thought I had. I said at least three times that it is a matter that the Opposition have very much in mind. It is one of those matters that we must balance.

I can give the hon. Gentleman a message for his constituents—the most effective way in which we can enforce law and order is to ensure that the people of both traditions are squarely on the side of law and order and against law-breakers. I thought that I had already said that the way to achieve that would be to give a complete assurance that the rules were fair and that they would be observed by all concerned. If we can achieve that and put an end to the alienation, we shall go a long way towards protecting people from violence. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will tell that to his constituents.

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): I have listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's arguments with great care. The amendment that he advocates seeks to delete from the Prime Minister's motion the phrase

"accepts the continuing need for temporary emergency powers."

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman really saying that there is no longer any need for temporary emergency powers, given the current position in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Archer: I thought that I had been discussing most of the emergency powers which exist. If the authorities already have powers on the statute book to do what is necessary, we do not need emergency powers. I am quite prepared to discuss the emergency powers one by one to determine which of them are required. The Opposition have been essentially pragmatic about this matter and essentially mindful of the need to preserve law and order. I am inviting the Government to look at each of the powers to see whether they are really necessary.

No one is calling for the Secretary of State to press a magic button and relieve all public anxieties at a stroke. It is inevitable that, in the current position in Northern Ireland, there will be disputes about the balance between maintaining proper security and retaining that respect for individual liberty that our ancestors won and which I hope the British people will never cease to cherish.

It is inevitable that there will be allegations of injustice as part of a propaganda campaign. It is inevitable that there will be errors of judgment. There can be no end to the problems until there has been a resolution of the political questions that beset Northern Ireland. That is why it is so important that the Government are seen to have the will to make political progress, and why it is important that the Prime Minister makes an effort to guard her tongue when she is dealing with sensitive issues.

But part of creating that atmosphere for political progress is to remove the sense of grievance and the feeling that things are not being done fairly. The Government must be seen to be listening to complaints, to be assessing them honestly and to be making an effort to reconcile security with justice. Without that, there can be no political progress.

It is because we are not persuaded that the Government are according the subject the urgency that it merits that we have tabled our amendment and will divide the House tonight.

6.3 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The emergency provisions legislation has been on the statute book since 1973. It was introduced at a time when terrorism in Northern Ireland was rampant and the House recognised that something had to be done to provide the authorities, the security forces and the judiciary in Northern Ireland with the weaponry to combat the terrorist threat. It was styled emergency legislation and made subject to a review by the House at six-monthly intervals.

The then Secretary of State said on the Second Reading of the Bill:

"It is the Government's intention that none of the provisions of the Bill, if it is passed, should continue in force a moment longer than it is needed."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1973; Vol. 855, c. 278.]

Indeed, the then Attorney-General declared that the measures were draconian. The legislation was never intended or desired to become a permanent feature of the legal process of Northern Ireland, but I regret that it is still necessary today, and I say that as a representative of Northern Ireland.

The House may blink its eyes at the facts. I resent what the Secretary of State referred to as the "favourable trend" in security matters in Northern Ireland. But for the intervention of providence, during the past few days there would have been carnage in Hollywood, the Campbell

family in Londonderry would have been annihilated and seven Ulster Defence Regiment men would have been in their graves. I cannot say that that is a favourable trend.

The fact that the legislation is necessary is a savage indictment of the security policies of successive British Governments. They have refused to face the problem of terrorism in Northern Ireland and have utterly failed to deal effectively with the IRA and the INLA by resonant action on the ground. Had they done so, the need to debate this legislation would have ceased long ago.

In 1984, 11 years after the legislation was first enacted, the men and women of Northern Ireland continue to be subjected to a vicious sectarian campaign of butchery and bloodshed at the hands of the IRA and its friends. There are new victims of violence—innocent men and women cut down to satisfy the lust for blood of the Republican terrorists. We have to comfort and console widows, orphans and broken-hearted parents.

The intervention of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) was most timely. What do we say when we visit people who shed tears over the victims of violence? There is no doubt that there is still a need for such legislation. We are still faced with the shattering of family circles and the isolation of Protestants in the border areas who live in daily fear of murder by IRA murder gangs. That is the reality of the position in Northern Ireland, and it is something that the Government have long refused to face or to take action to bring to a swift and effective conclusion.

During the past two weeks we have seen the effect on the ground of measures which my party has advocated for a long time. I wish to take this opportunity to commend and pay tribute to the security forces for the efficient manner in which they dealt with terrorists caught red-handed in the act of murder or attempted murder. No tears will be shed over dead IRA men by anyone from the Protestant population, which has had to bear the burden of atrocity after atrocity at the hands of that evil organisation. Terrorism can never be appeased or accommodated. It must be put down and eliminated. While it exists, we recognise and accept the need for emergency legislation. The vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland are demanding that the Government adopt a strategy which takes the initiative away from the terrorists and which will ultimately restore peace and normality to the Province.

We have heard that if we had a political settlement, all would be well. How far removed that is from the truth. If we had a political settlement tomorrow, the IRA would engage in even more violence, more bloodshed and more terrorism. When the south of Ireland had its political settlement, the worst page in Irish history was written. There was a civil war, when Irishmen fought Irishmen, and committed the most atrocious of murders. It was only when Kevin O'Higgins ruthlessly put that down, without apology, that peace was restored. We need to face that today. A strategy for the restoration of normal legal practices and traditions would be rendered unnecessary and we would not be debating this matter today, if we had a security settlement. All hon. Members could vote happily for the repeal of the legislation if we were not facing the present circumstances.

Those hon. Members who want confirmation of the true nature of the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA could do no better than read Sir George Baker's report. All hon. Members will be grateful to him for the way in which he handled that part of his inquiry. The facts are there. Northern Ireland representatives have presented those facts to the House again and again, but the House has rejected and opposed them, and thrown them out.

In his report Sir George Baker lays the truth on the line. What is Sinn Fein, and what is its relationship to the IRA? Paragraph 46 states:

> "There cannot be any reason or indeed possible doubt that Sinn Fein is not only a political wing but also a complete accomplice and partner of the PIRA, that both intended to continue using violence, and that the identity of the murderers and the other perpetrators of grave crimes is widely known."

Sinn Fein is the IRA under a different hat. Membership is clearly interchangeable. The House needs to take cognisance of that. The public statements of their spokesmen demonstrate the same evil murderous thinking as that of the IRA.

I regret that, having clearly shown the fusion of Sinn Fein and the IRA, Sir George Baker stopped short of recommending Sinn Fein's proscription. Sinn Fein is not a political party in any true meaning of the term. Members of the Government of Northern Ireland have rightly refused to meet Sinn Fein members who are public representatives. However, they should carry that policy to its logical conclusion and forbid contact between Sinn Fein and Government Departments and all others.

Every right thinking person in Northern Ireland utterly abhorred the action taken by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) when he brought into the House Linda Quigley, who has been convicted as a member of the IRA. She said that she supported the IRA's view that the British Government were a legitimate target. Therefore, she supported the bombing at Brighton, when an attempt was made to murder the Government. It must be utterly abhorrent to all people that an hon. Member brought such a person into the House. I am glad that the Labour party took action about that. I wish to put it on the record that that was appreciated by the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): My impression is that the hon. Gentleman is saying that Sinn Fein should be proscribed. Is that what he is saying?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman should listen.

Mr. Flannery: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that Sinn Fein should be driven underground? Is it not a fact that a large number of people voted for Sinn Fein and, therefore, that it has mass support? The hon. Gentleman says that he will drive Sinn Fein underground. Has he ever had any contact with the para-militaries who support his general viewpoint?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Sinn Fein should be proscribed, no matter how many votes it receives. That is not the issue. The issue is that Sinn Fein says that there should be violence and that a campaign of murder can be justified. I have always denounced and rejected murder. So-called Protestant para-militaries have fired bullets into my home because of my stand on those issues.

Mr. Flannery: Answer the question.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I have already answered the question.

Mr. Flannery: What about on the hillside and on the marches?

Rev. Ian Paisley: That shows how little the hon. Gentleman knows. I trust that he will make himself aware

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

of the facts before he asks such foolish questions. If I deviated from the law, the Government and Opposition Front Benches would call for my blood. Their difficulty is that I do not deviate from the law and they cannot get anything on me to shut me up. They have tried it before and failed. They will try it again and they will fail because I act within the law, and I shall continue to do so.

If an attempt is made to subvert the democratic wishes of the people of Ulster, which were made known through the ballot box when they voted to remain within the United Kingdom, there will be resistance in Ulster. Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right. The hon. Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) and for Foyle (Mr. Hume) know my views about that. The hon. Member for Hillsborough wishes to divert me from what I want to say.

The report states:

"It is the duty of the Government to govern, and it is fundamental to that duty that it should do everything within its power and the law to protect the right to life of every citizen including members of the security forces."

It is not the duty of the Government to set up security forces to be shot by the IRA. The security forces are entitled to protect themselves. The idea that they must be shot at first, and are lucky if they are not hit, before they can take action cannot be right. Security forces must act promptly to deal with terrorists.

I entirely agree with the statement that the duty to defend and protect the people of Northern Ireland lies with the Government. It is time that they faced that duty and ensured that Sinn Fein was not permitted openly and brazenly to encourage and incite the murder of members of the security forces and the Protestant population.

In December 1983, following the Harrods outrage, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that the Government were considering imposing sanctions against Sinn Fein. Nothing has happened. It is time that that nettle was grasped. The Secretary of State needs to apply his heart and mind to that matter.

The report states that the time is not ripe for the return of jury trial for scheduled cases. I wish that it were ripe. I opposed the abolition of juries. However, it would not be right to say that we can now abolish the Diplock courts and reintroduce juries. It would be impossible, because juries would be intimidated. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) that at the time we did not have proper facts on which to base our judgment. I was perfectly entitled at the time to vote against the abolition of jury trials. My vote was justified. Indeed, the matter was carried by only one vote in Committee.

The Democratic Unionist party is realistic enough to believe that it is not possible at this juncture to reintroduce jury trials for serious terrorist cases, because of the danger of intimidation of jurors. However, I regret that we have had to go down that road, and I look forward to the return of jury trials for all criminal offences as soon as possible. Trial by jury is much preferable, and we do not delight in the denial of British legal rights to the citizens of Northern Ireland.

My party has suggested that the Government should consider seriously the proposal that scheduled cases be heard by a panel of three judges, not by one judge sitting alone. Judges in Northern Ireland do a tremendous job in the most difficult circumstances, as do magistrates. Members of the judiciary have been attacked and murdered. It is not right that one judge should have to bear the tremendous burden of trying serious terrorist cases in which there may be 30 or 40 defendants. Some say that the Diplock courts should be abolished immediately, but that cannot be done. If it were done, the IRA would rejoice, for it would help the Republican campaign.

I welcome the recommendation in the report to deschedule some offences. Many offences of a purely domestic nature could satisfactorily be left to judge and jury, as could many cases of robbery and aggravated murder. Sir George has recommended greater flexibility in the cases that are certified out — treated as non-scheduled offences—and my party agrees with him. A case should go before the Diplock courts only when it is necessary. Wherever possible, a defendant should have the right to go before judge and jury.

A matter that causes great anxiety across the divide in Northern Ireland is the excessive periods that many prisoners are forced to spend on remand in custody. Remand is the worst sort of imprisonment. Prisoners are held in their cells for 23 hours a day and are let out for only one hour. That has become commonplace in Northern Ireland. Remand prisoners pray for quick trials. Although they may not be released, they would prefer to serve proper prison sentences. Those prisoners have not been convicted of any crimes, but some of them have been held for more than two years on the word of an accomplice or informer who has himself carried out some dastardly criminal deeds. Those prisoners are innocent until proven guilty, and it is intolerable that they should be held for so long before their cases are heard.

I appreciate the many difficulties with court administration, the police and legal personnel. However, it is vital that every effort is made to avoid long delays between arrest and trial. Paragraph 173 of the report states:

"Justice delayed is justice denied."

It is a total injustice for a man to spend two years in custody on remand and then to be acquitted. He will have served the equivalent of a four-year prison sentence without having been convicted of an offence. His family and work life are destroyed. The result is that the man leaves prison completely embittered, whether he be a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, because of his treatment. Those of us who know about such matters want to avoid at all costs the release on bail of those charged with murder merely because of delays in bringing their cases to court. The solution would be to get them to court much more quickly. A person facing a murder charge could skip over the border if he got bail, and it would be extremely difficult to get him back. There is no assurance of extradition. The Government must take on board that urgent problem.

I regret the fact that some people have given a blanket endorsement to the supergrass system in Northern Ireland. It would be entirely wrong for the House to believe that opposition to the system comes from only one side of the religious divide. It does not. I voiced opposition to it a long time ago, when the supergrass system was starting. Apart from reducing the number of defendants to 20 or fewer, and criticising the delays in starting such trials, Sir George saw no injustice in such cases. I see a great injustice in the system. There are some people in prison in Northern Ireland now who would never have been convicted in a court on this side of the Irish sea. It is a well-known principle of English law that an accomplice may

give evidence for the Crown, and that the judge must warn the jury that it is dangerous to convict on his uncorroborated evidence unless the jury is certain of the truthfulness of that evidence.

There was a debate on this matter in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and members of the Official Unionist party and of my party were instrumental in passing a resolution. In the debate I quoted Lord Justice Lawson, who warned that the Director of Public Prosecutions should consider carefully the statement of Chief Justice Hale, who said:

"The truth is that more mischief hath come to good men by these kinds of approvements by false accusations of desperate villains than benefit to the public by the discovery and convicting of real offenders."

In another case Lord Justice Lawson said:

"Nothing of a similar kind must happen again. Undertakings of immunity from prosecution may have to be given in the public interest. They should never be given by the police."

In the supergrass cases, the promises were made in the first instance by the police.

I emphasise the words:

"Undertakings of immunity . . . should never be given by the police."

Lord Justice Lawson also said:

"The Director should give them most sparingly and in cases involving grave crimes it would be prudent of him to consult the law officers before making any promises."

Northern Ireland law must be in line with the law in Great Britain. I was talking to an hon. Member today who said that supergrasses are acceptable in England. But they are different supergrasses from the ones in Northern Ireland.

This is a serious matter, because we are talking about ruthless men who have committed many crimes but who have had dangled in front of them the carrot of complete immunity, a new life somewhere else and sums of money. They know perfectly well that if they get out of prison there will be someone waiting for them who they do not wish to see, so all that they must do is to drop in his name. Recently I examined the affidavit of a supergrass who had mentioned the name of a high-ranking police officer. Had that officer not been able to prove that he had a perfect and watertight alibi, he would have been in court on the word of a supergrass. We should remember that the evidence has not been corroborated by other witnesses. It is the sole word of a man who has committed serious crimes and who has been offered immunity and inducements by the police. If a person wishes to turn Queen's evidence, he should be tried by the court and sentence should be passed on him. If the court wishes to take into consideration the fact that he has co-operated with the Crown, it can do so, but the court must have the final decision.

It will be interesting to see the result of the Bennett appeal; we have already seen the result of the Gilmour case. Whether we like it or not, it discredits the courts and the police in Northern Ireland. I have often said that that appeal could be taken to Europe. If something happened there, the authority of the courts and the police in Northern Ireland would be undermined. The Secretary of State needs to think carefully about this matter. Nobody in Northern Ireland believes that these are converted terrorists who have suddenly had a change of heart and are prepared, from the best of motives, to give evidence. I do not think that the people who are handling the matter believe it either.

I took a stand in the House against internment, and I was justified, because internment did not and could not work in the circumstances. Any Government have the right to have the power of Executive internment in an emergency, but it must be Executive internment only, and not a quasi-judicial system, such as the one where men stood behind a blanket and showed their feet and gave evidence in an attempt to put a legal gloss on something that was an act of the Executive. If an Executive wants to put people away because of an emergency, it should have the legislation to do it properly.

In criminal cases where an informer or an accomplice has been given a substantial inducement to give evidence the court should not convict unless there is corroboration by other evidence implicating the accused. That is only fair and just. People ask me why I want to retain the Union. I do so because I believe in the system of British justice and in the British legal system. I do not want that system destroyed. It is one of the most precious things that we have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, will have other matters to bring before the House. My point is that I want to see the IRA and its cohorts put down once and for all. I support the reintroduction of capital punishment and the effective action taken by the security forces in the past fortnight, but when it comes to court cases we cannot allow basic standards of British justice to be eroded or done away with.

6.32 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I welcome the report. I regret the death of Sir George Baker. I notice that I am in the report as being a sort of adviser. I did not realise that that was what I was doing. Like other former Secretaries of State, I was talking generally, but if I was an adviser, I am glad to have been so. I add a word of praise for Frances Elliott, who as the secretary will have done much of the detailed work.

The last review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act was in 1974 with the Gardiner report, and as a result of its recommendations the Act was amended in 1975. It is very important that investigations like Gardiner, which was on a large scale, or like this one by Sir George should take place from time to time, because when the law is derogated against to such a degree as in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act the matter should be reviewed in depth from time to time.

One of the recommendations in the report with which I disagree is the recommendation that when the new legislation has been passed it should be examined only every 12 months. When I was Secretary of State I felt that a review should be every six months, and I feel that now. When the law is derogated against in part of the United Kingdom, Parliament should examine the matter at least every six months. Twelve months is too long. The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act for the United Kingdom is less of a derogation from the normal rule of law.

The need for an emergency provisions Act arose out of the violence in Northern Ireland, which still goes on. The Secretary of State was wise not to make any comparisons that are invidous to the relatives of those who are killed now. Secretaries of State are liable—we have all been guilty of it—to say that things are better, but over 2,500 people have died in Northern Ireland as a result of terrorism. The proportion on this side of the water would be 70,000. Some 30,000 people have been injured in

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Northern Ireland and we can do the arithmetic as to the amount of carnage that there would be here on a proportional scale.

Therefore, is it surprising that normal political activities and discussions do not take place in the Province? The Secretary of State properly concentrated on the activities of the Provisional IRA and some of its running mates. They are the predominant para-military groups in terms of killing and murder, but these things happen on the other side of the political fence as well. For people on the outside there is no difference between a Loyalist murder and a Republican murder. Both are morally and politically wrong. A Secretary of State has to deal with both sorts.

It is not surprising that in the Province the two sides are polarised even more. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) spoke of South Armagh, which at one time was part of his constituency, and the way that people there feel about the Orange hall incident, about which I remember. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) is not here, but such things happen in Catholic areas as well. For example, I remember the butcher of Shankill who, oddly enough, had a Catholic Irish name.

There is violence in Northern Ireland, and no Government can sit back and say that they can do nothing about it. Therefore, there is a need for emergency powers. With my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), we are looking at whether there should be any changes in the emergency powers. It is right for Parliament to do so. There may be a better way of looking at parts of the changes rather than to-ing and fro-ing across the Floor of the House. The nature of the violence in Northern Ireland has to be understood. I get easily irritated these days when I meet people who have never been to Northern Ireland who tell me that it is something to do with Marxism or the Libyans. It is Irish to its very bones, whichever part it comes from. In one form or another, it has been showing itself for a good many years.

The nature of the para-military organisations must also be examined, to pick up a point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). There is the Irish National Liberation Army, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the Red Hand Commandos, and a list of about 30 para-military organisations. They say that their aim is war and they have captains, brigadiers and all the paraphernalia of armies, with volunteers and so on. When they are killed there are little paragraphs in the newspapers referring to them in para-military terms. It is a different place from this side of the water. It is in the United Kingdom, but it is different in this respect as in many others, and I do not say that to draw any other conclusion than that we have to try to understand it.

The Provisional IRA broke away from the official IRA in 1969. I have met members of the Provisional IRA on a number of occasions and they told me firmly, "We want none of that Marxist rubbish." That is why they broke away from the official IRA. They were nationalists—republicans pure and simple. The old IRA members are the lineal descendants of the 1920 and 1922 organisations. The Provisional IRA said that, in the Lower Falls, when they wrote "IRA" on the walls, it meant "I ran away" from the trouble. Out of that arose the Provisional IRA. The nature of terrorism leads on to the nature of Sinn Fein and the political groups.

The report talks about the definition of violence. This is the only legislation where a definition is attempted. However, "killing with a political aim", or whatever the words are, is not necessarily the right definition. The Orange hall terrorists, the killing by the butcher of the Shankill, the killing of the mentally retarded boy and the woman collecting the census returns some years ago who was shot in the throat were not political killings. We fall into a trap with a definition of terrorism. Perhaps we should not have one. It gives credence and an acceptability.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West said that 40 per cent. of bank robberies were dealt with by the scheduled courts, but to some extent it is better if such crimes were not dealt with in the scheduled courts. In the old days, it meant that one could be considered a special category prisoner, with all that that involved. Now it means that one can be appreciated in a certain way by one or other side of the community. A mother says, "My son was not just robbing the bank. He was doing it for the cause." We should look carefully at the definition of terrorism which was taken from the Diplock report and inserted in the early legislation.

Until today I had not realised all these implications of terrorism, but I did see its effect on compensation. In my day—this shows that sometimes Secretaries of State are hamstrung — the easiest way of obtaining money in Northern Ireland was to get one's old car, which had been imported from somewhere else in the United Kingdom, stolen, and then blown up. One then claimed that that was done by a politically motivated person and therefore received replacement money. I did not succeed in doing anything about that, but I concede that something should be done about it.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The moral of that is that the Northern Ireland Office never changes.

Mr. Rees: The moral is not that the Northern Ireland Office said anything—the moral is that a new piece of legislation was needed. The moral is that that would open up legislation and then one would not know what would happen with the other provisions thereby affected.

Of course, members of Provisional Sinn Fein are involved in violence. I learnt that also when I de-proscribed UVF when I first went to the Province. I was told that the UVF members wanted to go political and did not have a political wing. They then went on an incredible murdering rampage. The UVF was later re-proscribed.

The Committee on which four hon. Members who are present today sat, including the hon. Member for Antrim, North, had views on juryless courts, detention and a number of other matters. The hon. Member for Antrim, North was right to say that we had a view on proscription. When I went to the Province, however, I saw the need for proscription. It was invidious for people to call themselves captains, majors and other titles and to prance around the Province in the open. This did not mean that the proscription charge had much use. It is a charge that is added to all the charges of the courts. I strongly believed —I still do—that it was right to de-proscribe Provisional Sinn Fein. One need not be starry-eyed about this. I and many others know about the activities of the leader of

Provisional Sinn Fein which believes in the Armalite in support of politics. The Provisional Sinn Fein is at war, and I understand that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) rightly said that the Provisional Sinn Fein receives votes in Northern Ireland. I am sad that people this side of the water forget that in the south there is the Labour party and Dick Spring, the Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and in the north there is the SDLP and the various Unionist parties. The Provisional Sinn Fein is not representative of the people of Northern Ireland or southern Ireland. It is a minority group. I am sad when people from my area cavort with Provisional Sinn Fein and ignore the SDLP.

The other day I received a green card and two Loyalist para-militaries came to see me for a chat. I was surprised to receive that green card from Protestant para-militaries. I have received a Christmas card from a Loyalist para-military organisation. Perhaps that explains something about the nature of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: It does not tell us much about my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Rees: It does not tell us much about anything except that I talked with a variety of people in Northern Ireland because it was my duty to talk with them.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): The right hon. Gentleman did not talk to murderers.

Mr. Rees: Of course I did not talk to murderers, but sometimes one does not know what people are. I was surprised to note that, during the Ulster workers' strike, Loyalist politicians cavorted with para-militaries on the Loyalist side. One day, Loyalist politicians came into the castle to speak to us. They were accompanied by armed guards. They had minders alongside them with guns. Violence comes from both sides, and it is important to consider that fact in understanding Northern Ireland's future.

A fifth of the funds of the Provisional IRA come from abroad and four fifths come from home. Friday used to be bank robbery and post office robbery day. Why are not all the funds of the Provisional IRA sequestrated, as the funds of the NUM are? If the Government of southern Ireland moved half as quickly to sequestrate the funds of the Provisional IRA as our judiciary did to sequestrate the NUM's funds and the money of many of my constituents, we might get somewhere. That is a thought.

Mr. Molyneaux: They are all Tories.

Mr. Rees: I am told that they are all Tories. I do not care what people are.

Mr. McCusker: The right hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point which was touched on by Sir George Baker in another regard. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that any IRA money is promptly lodged in the account of Provisional Sinn Fein? To sequestrate those funds, one needs to proscribe Sinn Fein.

Mr. Rees: I do not believe that the NUM is proscribed in this country. My point is that the funds of the para-military groups buy the weapons. Although my point about NUM funds may not be relevant, I point out that the funds need to be examined.

I was a little worried about the way in which the Secretary of State dealt with internment. It took 18 months to end internment. I did not receive the support of the then Opposition. Week by week, fortnight by fortnight, I let people out of prison on the basis of the Gardiner report. The Labour party ended internment by December 1975, but that was not done with the approval of both sides of the House. I still watch what is happening in Northern Ireland. I have heard stories—when I was Secretary of State I knew that most stories were wrong, but now I do not know what stories are wrong—that discussions are occurring between the Government of the South and the British Government about the reintroduction of internment on the border. That would be wrong.

I know that many politicians in the South believe that Mr. Faulkner got it wrong in 1971. Internment was carried out in a hamfisted way at that time. If one could not get the right man, one got his brother or uncle. The figures were all wrong. The South of Ireland has a history of internment. I do not care what that history is — internment is wrong. People should be put before the courts with evidence properly collected. I agree with those hon. Members who have said that the internment provision should be taken from the statute book.

Mr. Maginnis: The right hon. Gentleman has expressed his opposition to internment. Does he see justification in holding in prison someone who has served a term for committing a serious terrorist offence, who is due to be released from prison and who, during his imprisonment term, has shown neither remorse nor a desire to break away from his terrorist connections? Does the right hon. Gentleman see any justification in introducing internment from that end?

Mr. Rees: Frankly, I do not. I understand how it sounds to someone who lives in the border areas where constituents, relatives and friends are shot and killed in a way we do not understand here. It would be self-defeating to reintroduce internment under any guise.

In 1973, when the Committee considering the emergency provisions legislation discussed juryless courts, there was talk of intimidation. I recall that the intimidation was carried out by Loyalists. Whatever the arguments about a fair trial, whenever I appear on television to discuss this subject—I have not done that for a long time—I receive the usual spate of letters, one lot calling me an IRA lover and the other a Loyalist lover. Whichever way it goes in Northern Ireland, the people are even-handed in interpreting what one says. Their interpretation depends on how they look at these aspects.

There is intimidation of jurors in Northern Ireland. In no circumstances would I be a juryman in Northern Ireland. There would be threats to the life of a juryman whether he be Protestant, Catholic, Loyalist, or Republican or whatever else. I shall not develop this point further, but it is something that I believe strongly.

I should like to finish by suggesting how the matter should be dealt with and by asking some questions. The Secretary of State will consider the report with his staff and the Law Officers, but legislation in this way is not the answer. As a former Home Secretary, I am worried about informers, corroborative evidence, the role of the police and the difference between what goes on here and what goes on in Northern Ireland.

The role of the police should be studied by a judicial inquiry. I do not know what form it should take. It could be done by a Select Committee calling evidence. I ask the

[Mr. Rees]

Secretary of State not to come to the House at first with a new Bill. We go to and fro on the Floor of the House and in Committee we divide on party lines. The Government generally obtain what they want, because of their majority. The matter deserves a proper examination. There will be no legislation this Session, so there is plenty of time for the matter to be studied.

I noticed that the report contained a section about public order. In her speech at the Guildhall the other day, the Prime Minister said that the Home Office would complete a review of public order in 1985. It has taken much time because the review started in 1979 when I was at the Home Office. That shows how difficult the matter is. The Prime Minister suggested that the review would relate to current disorders.

I have studied carefully section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936. The rest of the Act deals with marches and uniforms and so on. If we are to have new public order legislation arising out of the events of the past year, let us have a full investigation and incorporate Northern Ireland in the legislation. I am usually keen on keeping Northern Ireland separate. I do not mean that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 should be discussed in this way—but there is much else that is relevant.

I know that Sir George Baker was probably bombarded by those people in Northern Ireland who disagree with the 50 per cent. remission scheme which was introduced in my time. It would be a mistake to change that.

What about Maghaberry prison? Maghaberry, which has taken nine or 10 years to finish, was thought by the Labour Government to be a replacement for Long Kesh or the Maze—whatever one chooses to call it. We were going to get rid of detention and special category status. We were going to have proper accommodation. The H blocks were a short-term solution. They were copied from Low Newton prison—as it was then called—a then new prison in Durham. The H blocks were built quickly by the Army to begin the process of having normal prison accommodation. We know what happened when the special category status ended. Is Maghaberry to be used as a replacement prison? Has the policy been changed? Will we continue with the Maze? What has happened to Maghaberry? I ask that because it was a gleam in our eye. We thought that we were doing the right thing, but I rarely hear anything about it now. It may not even be finished.

My next point is an intriguing one which I put from time to time in passing to the Minister of State. I have been looking afresh at the 1969 Downing street declaration. It dealt with the position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom. The first paragraph of the declaration listed some of the people who had attended the meeting with some Cabinet Ministers and included Major Chichester-Clark, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Andrews, Mr. Porter and the Minister of Development, Mr. Faulkner. There was a six-hour discussion. The second paragraph said:

"the GOC Northern Ireland will with immediate effect assume overall responsibility for security operations. He will continue to be responsible directly to the Ministry of Defence but will work in the closest co-operation with the Northern Ireland Government and . . . the Royal Ulster Constabulary. For all security operations the GOC will have full control of the deployment and tasks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary."

By 1977-78 when I was last involved, the primacy of the police had begun and the role of the Army was declining. I doubt whether there are now more than 7,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland, and when one considers the normal resident battalions, one realises that dealing with terrorism is now largely a policing-UDR operation. People tell me that it is a colonial matter. It is a funny colonial matter when the whole population can be kept down by 7,000 soldiers who have their wives and families with them. That suggestion is utter nonsense.

I always thought that the Downing street communiqué that I have quoted was of doubtful legal propriety. It does not matter whether it was or it was not because things did not happen as expected, if the Army was not there in support of the civil power. It was the other way round—the RUC was in support of the Army. By 1976-77 that was changing and that change has continued. That statement, which must have been believed to have the force of law, has never been rescinded.

Should it not be, the quicker that there are fewer soldiers in Northern Ireland the better. We have depended upon them over the years, particularly four of five years ago. Matters are best handled by the RUC using normal policing methods, but changes are needed on the border. In the short term, one needs the Army on the border.

We need legislation. The House should put its mind to how the existing legislation should be altered. Important matters need to be considered, but I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North—it is perhaps unusual to agree constantly with the hon. Member—that if there were a political solution, and there is none at present, the violence would continue. There is no way of ending it. It has become a way of life. We know how it was ended in the South of Ireland, but when people talk of a military solution they are wrong, and when they talk of a political solution they are wrong.

As long as Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, we have a responsibility to work with the people of Northern Ireland to start a movement towards a political solution. That is what the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 is for. The Act is not the way forward; it is part of the way forward. It must be changed, which is why I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West, but we need special legislation to deal with special circumstances.

6.57 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): When the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 first came into force in August 1973, based largely on the Diplock report of late 1972, no one would have chosen to believe that its provisions would still be necessary in 1985.

The amending Act of 1975, based on Gardiner's recommendations, and the further consolidation Act of March 1978 have reflected, as Labour and Conservative Governments have recognised, a continuing need to try to provide some additional legislation to allow the police and judiciary in Northern Ireland to deal with the special difficulties inflicted on our community by terrorists.

It was right for the Government in April 1983 to invite Sir George Baker to carry out a further examination of the operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 to determine whether the legislation struck a proper balance between safeguarding the liberties of the individual and providing the security forces and courts with adequate powers to enable them to protect the public from current and foreseeable terrorist crime.

It is there that I found difficulty in understanding the matter raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), when he said that it was objectionable to have terms of reference for Sir George Baker which began:

"Accepting that temporary emergency powers are necessary".

We remember that the emergency legislation was invoked in the first place to deal with the terrorism which was still current when Sir George was asked to carry out a study and make a report. In those circumstances, the terms of reference were natural. Sir George submitted his report to the Government in March 1984 and it is sad that we have had to wait until today, when the House has virtually disappeared for the Christmas recess, to debate its findings and recommendations. It is less than a worthy tribute to the efforts and dedication of the late Sir George Baker that that should be the way in which the House deals with a matter affecting the lives of everyone in Ulster. However, it is appropriate that we should debate the report before the House decides to renew the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 for a further six months later this evening.

I know that the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West will approve of the debate, for I recall that when the House was asked to renew the Act in July he sought to justify leading 70 of his parliamentary colleagues in a Division against the proposition as a protest against the Government's failure to consider the Baker report sooner. We sympathise with his reasons, if not his action, and take considerable consolation from the fact that later tonight he will be able, in the light of Sir George Baker's in-depth investigation and subsequent recommendations, to vote for the renewal of the Act. To abstain would be to show a lack of courage and concern for the needs of a community which is under threat from terrorist killers and their fellow travellers, as was recognised by Sir George Baker. To oppose the renewal would be to capitulate to the lunatic fringe, which wants so much to bring the law, the House and the country into ridicule.

That lunatic fringe is typified by the likes of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who can mock those who have been killed and injured at the hands of terrorists, including hon. Members and their families, members of the security forces and members of the law-abiding British public in Great Britain and Ulster, by bringing terrorists to the House. Many of us recall the services that were given to Ulster by those like the right hon. Members for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason). We find it difficult to equate that responsible face of Labour politics with the recent actions of the hon. Member for Islington, North.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Mr. Maginnis: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I note that his pen portrait in the parliamentary year book states that he likes animals. I am not one lightly or irresponsibly to use the analogy that I am about to offer to the House, but the IRA members whom the hon. Gentleman brought into the House are animals in the worst possible sense of the word. I understand his pen portrait rather better now that I know that he brings such people into the House. It has been forgotten already that he brought Gerry Adams into the House.

Mr. McNamara: Gerry Adams is entitled to be here.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman chooses to bring to the House those such as Adams, Quigley and McLaughlin. They are murderers.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that those who come into the House as visitors should in some sense be restricted? Is he suggesting further that there should be controls on those who come through the doors of the House? Is he saying that Members of this place do not have a right to talk to people from Northern Ireland, or anywhere in Britain, about conditions in prisons and their particular political views? Does he accept that the newspaper reports of last weekend were deliberately blown up to avoid the vile nature of the strip searches of women prisoners in Armagh and other prisons being brought to light?

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman should consider, as should any other hon. Member who contemplates such irresponsible action, that people have lost their lives at the hands of those like Adams, Quigley and McLaughlin. If he did not hear me make the comment a short while ago, I repeat that those people are murderers. They have killed my constituents and constituents of my colleagues from Ulster.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): That is right. They are vermin.

Mr. Maginnis: They have killed people in Great Britain, including members of this place. The hon. Member for Islington, North should not attempt to justify his irresponsible actions.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the guests of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) stated that members of the Government are legitimate targets to kill? That is the type of guest that we had in this building.

Mr. Maginnis: I am aware that that sort of guest was brought here by the hon. Member for Islington, North. I am aware also that those who entered the House as his guests would have taken advantage of the invitation to see everything that might be useful to a terrorist coming into the House with the intention of killing an hon. Member or hon. Members.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman seems to be going into a rather lengthy flight of fantasy. Does he agree that this building is a public place, that it is owned by the public and paid for by the public? Does he agree further that any member of the public is entitled to go through St. Stephen's entrance and to enter the Palace after passing through the screening process? If anyone wanted to obtain a plan of this building, he would be able to buy a history book in any bookshop in this country, or anywhere in the world, which would show him the layout. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is trying to stir up some non-story and non-issue as a way of avoiding the real causes of the problems in Northern Ireland and the real and serious violations of justice in Northern Ireland, of which apparently he approves.

Mr. McCusker: Mr. Airey Neave was murdered within the precincts of this building.

Mr. Maginnis: I do not think that someone with the irresponsibility of the hon. Member for Islington, North will be convinced by my argument. However, it is important that it is said in the House that, irrespective of

[Mr. Maginnis]

whether people can obtain plans of the Palace or whether they have to pass through a security screening process, we do not want guests of the sort that the hon. Gentleman brought to the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) said, Airey Neave was killed within the precincts of the House. We remember that the wife of the Government Chief Whip was killed a short time ago, along with other members of the Conservative party, while attending a conference at Brighton. I believe that such action is morally wrong, irrespective of what the practical implications may or may not be.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. McNamara *rose*——

Mr. Maginnis: I give way to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), not the hon. Member for Islington, North.

Mr. McNamara: I do not seek to doubt the hon. Gentleman's sincerity, and I do not question the right of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) to bring who he wishes into the House. Every Member is entitled to bring guests to this place. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said a short time ago, he spoke in this place to convicted Loyalist prisoners who came to see him.

Mr. Maginnis: The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South did not say that. They were not convicted murderers. The right hon. Gentleman is more responsible than that.

Mr. McNamara: At any rate, my right hon. Friend gave the impression that he knew something about them. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the antics of the press over the past weekend were wise and informed, in that basically it gave the Provo IRA a victory by suggesting that Parliament was scared? Surely it gave the IRA a bloodless headline. The press decided to blow up an incident which had taken place two months earlier, of which it already had knowledge, and about which it had been informed. When the press was informed it did not consider the matter to be worthy of comment, yet it was within a fortnight of the dreadful happenings at Brighton.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman has some of his facts wrong. He implied that the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South brought convicted terrorists to the House.

Mr. Merlyn Rees *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Maginnis: I know that the right hon. Gentleman did not do so. I am trying to make it clear that he did not behave in that irresponsible way.

Perhaps the Baker report summarises majority feelings in Ulster, in the House and in the country as a whole when it states:

"In my analysis of the powers I tried to be as objective as possible remembering, when striking the balance that my terms of reference required, that there are human duties as well as human liberties,"—

I repeat, human duties as well as human liberties—

"on the one hand to equate with powers needed in a civilised community to protect its members on the other."

That is certainly a justification of the need to continue to renew the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act.

The report was not based simply on some establishment perspective. Sir George carefully considered the stated intention of the IRA and quoted often from its newsheet *An Phoblacht*. He was also quick to point out that the paper emanates from 51/53 Falls road, Belfast, an address which will find Gerry Adams, head of the Provisional Sinn Fein. Here and elsewhere Sir George saw, as I do, the inextricable links between Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. Having given examples of that in paragraphs 35 to 47, Sir George concluded in paragraph 50 that

"current and foreseeable . . . incidence of terrorist crime is such that there is little room for manoeuvre . . . it would be irresponsible to give up emergency powers."

I hope that when hon. Members vote they will remember that that was the conclusion drawn by Sir George Baker.

Sir George made some useful recommendations on bail. He stated the need to add to section 2(5)(*c*) of the Act the words

"or of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve".

That needs to be done, and I should like to take a little time to deal with the matter.

In Ulster, several policemen in different incidents have come into contact with known terrorists. Believing that their lives or the lives of the civilian community which they had to protect might be in danger, they opened fire, killing the suspected terrorists. That happened on two occasions, and the suspected terrorists who were killed were found to be unarmed. Probably to placate public opinion, or the opinion of a section of the public, the Director of Public Prosecutions decided that those policemen should be brought before the court so that a decision could be made on whether they had acted rashly and committed a murder or were guilty of manslaughter. There were those of us who believed that they had not acted rashly, knowing the history and involvement of the people who were killed.

However, what disturbed us more was the fact that those policemen were remanded in custody in the same prison as para-military murder suspects. When their families went to visit them, they were subjected to abuse and threats from members of families of the para-militaries at the prison. I, along with my friend the late Edgar Graham, who was murdered by the IRA, went to see the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), to discuss the plight of those members of the RUC. One must give credit where credit is due, because the Minister acted speedily, recognising the difficulty, and provided for the policemen to be remanded in police custody. That immediately raised a hullabaloo from Sinn Fein supporters, who suggested that that action had been taken for some partisan reason. Sir George recognised the difficulty and suggested the amendment to the Act that I mentioned. I should like to see that done.

I should like to expand a little more on that matter. I should also like to see any member of the security forces who is charged with a serious crime arising out of a duty that he is doing being remanded into either police or military custody. In Ulster, five members of the Ulster Defence Regiment are presently remanded in custody in Crumlin road, where their families are subject to abuse and threats when they go to visit them. Because they were alleged to have gone off duty to commit the crime and then gone back on duty, they were not remanded into Army custody. That is unfair—it is a double standard. It is

stirring around in the pot to see whether a reason can be found to prevent those men being remanded in military custody. They were officially on duty when the alleged crime was committed. They have been in custody for over a year, and might be for the most of another year. They should also be catered for when the Act is amended to deal with the RUC and the RUC reserve.

I shall not mention some recommendations in the section dealing with bail, because they involve purely legal argument and I do not feel competent or qualified to speak on that. However, one does not need to be so qualified to see the merits, in scheduled cases, of adopting a 28 or 30-day remand in custody in lieu of the present seven days, which is meaningless and, worst of all, a waste of the courts' time. Any anomaly that that would have created in the past no longer exists, Sir George tells us, because under sections 59 and 9 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982, that can be done with the accused's consent. Baker admits, and I recognise, that terrorists are unlikely to be so co-operative, but it should be possible to adopt a process that would save the courts' time and, ultimately, the accused would at least benefit from having his case brought to court more quickly.

On young offenders, I find a substantial ally in Baker. The House will not want me to repeat the arguments that I used in a debate during the first week of this Session, when I spoke on SOSPs—those held at the Secretary of State's pleasure. I appeal to the Secretary of State to think this question out in the same spirit as Sir George did when he said—and it is worth hearing—

> "I am not sentimental, but there is a case for compassion and the giving of a hope of release at however distant a date. I recommend that the Secretary of State should consider making a statement of policy about such cases and indeed all who became caught at a relatively early age in communal violence and are serving indeterminate sentences."

I am grateful for the answers that the Under-Secretary has given me on that subject in the past few days, but I again urge a more radical and compassionate approach to those who were inveigled into terrorist crime at a time of communal strife when they were so young.

Baker recognises the reality of terrorism when he says that the time is, sadly, not ripe for the return of jury trial for scheduled cases. He spends much time deliberating on the merits and demerits of the single judge and of a plurality of judges, but concludes that the latter would simply not be practical in terms of the limited number of judges available. While that may be an unfortunate, if necessary, conclusion, there is no doubt in my mind that the compromise of lay assessors or resident magistrates sitting with the judge would create more problems than it would solve. I shall not go into the details, as the difficulties are spelt out by Sir George in paragraphs 127 and 128.

The Secretary of State has suggested that he may find a way to certify certain offences out of the scheduled category. I note that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and others have advocated that today. That would certainly be welcomed if it would speed up the judicial process without creating loopholes in the law which could be exploited by terrorists. Rather than taking that step all in one go, I suggest that the Act should provide —the Minister may tell us that it already does—a means whereby an application can be made for certain offences to be certified out. It could then be left, like the granting of bail, to the discretion of a High Court judge. When we have experience of that, more permanent provision could be made in the Act.

I cannot agree with Baker's recommendation that the length of time for which a suspect can initially be held for questioning should be brought into line with the 48-hour period provided for in the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Let us remember that we are dealing with terrorists and that the RUC has to deal with people trained to hinder and frustrate the system. Among other things, it has to deal with documentation and medical examination and conduct inquiries to compare fingerprints, especially in cases of refusal to disclose identity. The RUC also needs time to conduct the necessary interrogation. It may have to make inquiries in the Irish Republic or in Great Britain. All those things take time, but none takes more time than the medical examinations which people held for questioning have the right to demand. If the person is co-operative and innocent, he is often released before 72 hours have passed, but if he is a terrorist it is necessary to invoke the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which enables the police to apply to the Secretary of State for extensions up to five days.

There is much to be said for Baker's idea that powers of arrest for scheduled offences and offences under the emergency provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act should be dealt with in one Act, but the question of the 72-hour initial holding period should not be dodged. It may often mean that there is no need for an extension, whereas a 48-hour limit would inevitably lead to applications for extensions in the majority of cases. We must seek to assist and not embarrass the police in these matters.

With regard to propaganda against the security forces, we all want to see the rule of law hold sway for citizens in Ulster, as I believe from experience it does. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North does not have that experience and perhaps absolves himself in his own mind from showing concern for anyone who is not a member of, aligned with or in some way involved with terrorist crime. I often wonder about that.

Mr. McNamara If the hon. Gentleman made that statement outside the House, it would be defamatory. Is he suggesting that I have at any time, or in any way, ever supported terrorist methods in Northern Ireland, or anywhere else, or that I have ever done anything other than support absolutely the rule of law in the Province? That is what I am concerned about—the maintenance of the rule of law.

Mr. Maginnis: I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest at once. What I have said, and what I have seen in the House—I am prepared to say this outside if it gives the hon. Gentleman satisfaction — is that the hon. Gentleman has constantly shown himself to be concerned with people who have been involved in crime.

Mr. McNamara: Name one of them.

Mr. Maginnis: Perhaps I should clarify this so that the hon. Gentleman does not misunderstand. He has shown himself to be concerned, for example, about the two young people who were shot in Londonderry and the reason why they were shot. He has shown himself to be concerned with people involved in incidents of that kind rather than with the victims who, week in and week out, are murdered by the IRA.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman must get his history right. In view of the tradition from which the hon. Gentleman comes, I remind him—he may be surprised to hear this, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) will recall the fact —that I was the first Member in the parliamentary Labour party to speak in favour of understanding the Ulster Unionists and the Loyalist position, at a time when they were perhaps the most reviled sect in the rest of the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman should bear that fact in mind.

Is the hon. Gentleman saying that one should not be concerned about the deaths of young people shot by British troops and equally about the deaths of people murdered by terrorists? One should be concerned about anyone's death, and the circumstances in which it occurs, if one is attempting to find a remedy for the situation in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman's problem is that he is myopic on his own side. He cannot be objective about the situation as a whole and about the whole community—both sides of it.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman is getting quite excited about this. I am speaking of my experience of his interventions in the House. He has just repeated that he is concerned about the two people shot in Londonderry. No doubt he is prepared to use the argument that we have already heard. If the police knew that they were coming, why did they not line up on both sides of the road and arrest them when they walked into the trap? The hon. Gentleman cannot be so naive as to believe that terrorists operate like that. If there is any undue police activity, the terrorists simply bide their time and come back a week later when the police and security forces do not expect them. Then, as in the Mountain Lodge incident, four or five people may be killed. Is that the kind of action that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends wish to see? Do they want to give the IRA not just the chance to fire the first shot, but the chance to get away and bide their time so that they can kill again at a later date?

Mr. McNamara: I do not want the IRA to get away with anything, any more than I want the UVF or the UDR to get away with anything. I want to establish whether, if the police had reasonable suspicion that those two people were about to commit a crime, any attempt was made to arrest them before they arrived at the scene of the crime, which they had not actually attempted to commit. All that we know at present is that there will never be any trial, so we shall never be able to test the evidence. That being so, what the British Army did in that instance may have given yet another victory to the Provisional IRA, just as the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* did when they took on my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) last weekend.

Mr. Maginnis: First, I resent the fact that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has coupled the UDR with the IRA and the UVF. The UDR is a law-abiding, law enforcement agency, which has served for 14 years in Ulster with credit and a great deal of personal sacrifice. It is less than honourable to couple that body with terrorist organisations.

The hon. Gentleman has annoyed me so much by that remark that I have forgotten what the question was.

It is not for me to tell the Secretary of State what changes to make to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts or to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts or to tell him what new Act, if any, should replace them. The Secretary of State will bring such proposals to the House, they will be debated here and we will have the opportunity to amend them.

Like Sir George Baker, the Secretary of State and the Ministers should bear in mind the dangers facing law-abiding citizens. Many hon. Members will forget about those dangers. Many other hon. Members who speak in this debate will forget about the dangers faced by members of the security forces. It is to them, rather than to our biased minority, that I direct the attention of the House. Before the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) jumps to his feet, I must say that I am not thinking of Roman Catholics, many of whom are law-abiding and decent citizens and who are, as much as any of us, the victims of IRA terrorism. It is to the law-abiding citizens rather than to the vocal fellow-travellers of the IRA that the Secretary of State owes the first consideration, if and when he amends the emergency provisions legislation in line with Sir George Baker's recommendations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. We are making very slow progress. Many hon. Members who wish to speak will be disappointed unless speeches are considerably shorter.

7.32 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): I am grateful for the opportunity to join a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in paying tribute to the late Sir George Baker and in acknowledging the work done by Frances Elliott.

Even if all one's views were not accepted by Sir George Baker, it was a very pleasant experience to appear before him. I found Sir George shrewd and sympathetic, and a delightful as well as a distinguished personality. His report may be unique among state papers for its robust and racy style. The report can almost be read for pleasure as well as for information. The Secretary of State described it as a good read—a colloquial comment upon a colloquial report.

I have a few somewhat critical observations to make on the handling of proceedings in terrorist cases. First, I agree with what the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said about the possibility of a compassionate approach to young prisoners, particularly those serving indeterminate sentences. Secondly, I echo what was said by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is a lawyer, and I certainly am not, but I agree with him that justice delayed is justice denied. There is great concern in all parts of the House about the delay in bringing alleged terrorists, or persons concerned in terrorist offences, before a court, especially when they are in custody and not on bail.

Next, I warmly agree that discretion should be given to the Director of Public Prosecutions to certify cases out of schedule. Here again, there is assent in different quarters of the House today.

Concern has been expressed about the Diplock courts. It is said that the burden upon one judge is great and terrible. If it were possible to provide assessors, that would be a great gain. The Secretary of State says that a new judge has been appointed in Northern Ireland. I hope that when the Under-Secretary replies to the debate he will say something on those matters.

I would defend the Diplock courts as a regrettable necessity where—as in Northern Ireland—courts cannot function properly because jurors cannot perform their duties without fearing for their lives, their property or their families. I think that the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said it all when he said that he would not be a juryman in Northern Ireland. I think that would be the answer given by any hon. Member who was asked to serve on a jury in Northern Ireland. It was because jurymen are in danger if they do their duty that the special criminal courts were set up in the Irish Republic. Sir George Baker paid considerable attention to those courts. He quoted Diplock as saying that:

"A frightened juror is a bad juror".

There are vivid words in paragraph 99 of Sir George Baker's review. Referring to a Standing Committee which sat in 1972-73, Sir George says that:

"According to Sir Elwyn Jones the AG gave a 'vivid and grim account of particular cases of intimidation of jurors by IRA and UVF men . . . ' . . . An example which is clear in the recollection of one witness is of a large and powerful juryman shivering with fright and pleading to be discharged after a night of threats by telephone. The LCJ had been obliged to discharge that jury. A senior barrister remembered the trial of a 'loyalist': the subtle but effective intimidation was the intermittent beating throughout the trial of a Lambeg drum at a distance from the court but so that the sound was clearly heard by the jury."

Diplock courts are a painful necessity. However, even in the Diplock courts the central principles of our justice are maintained. The trial takes place in open court with the calling and cross-examination of witnesses. The onus is on the prosecution to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt. The accused has the right to take legal advice and to be represented by a lawyer. If necessary, he receives legal aid. The Diplock courts conform to the European Convention on Human Rights which in article 6 provides, among other things, that hearings should be public, that the defendant should be presumed innocent until proved guilty, and that he should have the right to legal aid and advice and the right to cross-examine witnesses.

There are further safeguards around the Diplock courts. The right of appeal against conviction or sentence is unfettered, whereas in general in the case of a trial by judge and jury the accused has to obtain prior leave from the Court of Appeal or the trial judge. There is, moreover, the most important protection that, if a confession is admitted in evidence and the defence gives prima facie evidence that it has been extracted by ill treatment, the onus is on the prosecution to disprove that evidence.

It has recently become apparent that trial by jury does not always give satisfaction, even on this side of the water. Too much is sometimes claimed for it. In the summer of 1980, Lord Fitt, who was then a Member of this House, and I espoused the cause of the late Joseph Conlon, which was brought to my notice by a distinguished Unionist. We were convinced, as was Lord Fitt, Mr. Conlon's parish priest, Father McKinley, and Cardinal Hume, that Mr. Conlon was wrongly convicted at the Old Bailey after a long trial for possessing nitroglycerine for the purposes of terrorism. Guiseppe Conlon, as he was known, is dead, but we want his name to be cleared for the satisfaction of his relations and of justice. We have brought the case to the notice of more than one Home Secretary, none of whom has seen his way to recommend a royal pardon, although the conviction was made on forensic evidence and the expert shares our misgivings.

The relevance of the Conlon case to the debate can be revealed by quoting a few words which I uttered in the House in the early morning of 4 August 1980 on the Consolidated Fund Bill. I said:

"I have compressed into a few inadequate words a complicated case resting almost entirely on forensic evidence, difficult for the non-scientific mind to grasp. The jury's task was hard and uneviable. I cannot help wondering whether this was a case less suitable for the Old Bailey than for one of those maligned Diplock courts of Northern Ireland, where terrorists are tried by a judge without a jury. Those courts are familiar with the methods of terrorism and with such matters as innocent contamination."—[*Official Report*, 4 August 1980; Vol. 990, c. 386.]

The case rested on the fact that he had evidence of explosive material on his fingers. I should not have described the trial of Mr. Conlon as exhibiting a jury as the cherished safeguard of which the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) spoke. Such words would be a mockery to the Conlon family.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General addressed the American Bar Association in the summer, he said:

"in combating terrorism in Northern Ireland, the principle is that a balance must be sought to ensure that justice is done, both in the sense of justice in providing a proper trial for those accused of terrorist offences and justice to the law abiding citizen in ensuring that terrorism does not defeat the very means by which the security of the public and the process of law can be assured".

The right to live in safety under the law in Northern Ireland can, alas, be preserved today only by the limitations that Sir George Baker investigated and which the House is discussing. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General was speaking of the use of evidence of accomplices.

Speaking at Darwin college, Cambridge, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, said in November 1983 that he had never understood the objection to the use of informers of which supergrasses are only one example. Perhaps I might say with the greatest diffidence that Lord Lane might not have had the situation in Northern Ireland fully in mind. We are all aware of the great danger of abuse of the system of supergrasses. The size of supergrass trials is a factor which has given rise to anxiety and which, I suppose, Lord Chief Justice Lord Lowry had in mind in a recent case. There is a responsibility to ensure that the system is not abused. A recent case, which might have shocked and upset many people on both sides of the water, shows that the judiciary in Northern Ireland is determined to ensure that proper standards of justice are maintained.

Sir George Baker went into the logical case of proscribing Sinn Fein, meaning Provisional Sinn Fein. He sometimes says just Sinn Fein when he clearly means Provisional Sinn Fein but not official Sinn Fein.

Mr. Hume: It has changed its name.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Sir George Baker cited what the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) said in the *Daily Telegraph* of 20 December 1983—

"as one newspaper neatly put it Sinn Fein is the IRA in drag".

To plain men, it is difficult to understand why the hon. Member for Belfast, West has not already been arraigned under the law of sedition or otherwise. I should like to quote two distinguished Irishmen of the Republic. It is the view of the Chief Justice of the Republic, as set out in paragraph 423 of the report, that this is

"an evil and dangerous organisation whose object was to overthrow the state and its institutions if necessary by force".

[Sir John Biggs-Davison]

Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, as Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, when banning broadcasts by proscribed organisations, said:

"The propaganda activities of Provisional Sinn Fein in support of Provisional IRA are in our view a danger to the state."

Sir George Baker comes to no conclusion about whether Sinn Fein should be proscribed. I notice that the Ulster Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party have come to a conclusion and that there is an early-day motion on the subject which has attracted some support on this side of the House. As I understand it, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not fully made up his mind. It is significant, however, that the demand for proscription of Sinn Fein comes from the front line—those who live in danger such as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. The point made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) about sequestration is interesting and important.

I wonder whether, in due course, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will come to a different conclusion. I can recall a time when not even the Provisional IRA was illegal in Great Britain, as distinct from Northern Ireland. I argued that it should be and was shot down at the party conference at Blackpool in 1973 by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Whitelaw. In 1974, however, the Provisional IRA was proscribed in Great Britain. I dare say that there will be a change of line in regard to Sinn Fein.

A short time ago, private Ian Thain of the First Battalion Light Infantry was sentenced to life imprisonment for a murder which was perpetrated during a disturbance. I shall not comment on the case as I think that there is to be an appeal. This is a most significant event. It is distressing but it refutes any assertion that the Armed Forces of the Crown have licence to operate beyond the law. The rule of law is being upheld. The Government's acceptance of the main recommendations of the Baker report is some testimony to that. There is always a temptation—and a provocation from terrorists—for the security forces and the authorities behind them to resort to excessive use of police and military power. Such action would suit the terrorist propaganda purpose.

Every effort must continue to be made to keep the sword of justice unsullied. At the same time, the theme of the Baker report is that there is no shred of evidence that the courts and the security forces would be able to combat and eradicate terrorism without the limitations of the ordinary law that we have been discussing.

Sir George's inquiry led him firmly to the conclusion that emergency powers must be retained, not for the sake of one side of the community, but for the sake of everyone in Northern Ireland. Sir George said:

"It is utterly unrealistic to believe, as some do, that the main powers given by the Act can be repealed tomorrow or in the near future."

It was unclear to me whether the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West accepted the necessity in present circumstances for the continuation of emergency powers. When some of my hon. Friends asked him to answer that question, he failed to do so. Perhaps we shall get some clarification from the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) who is to wind up for the Opposition.

The amendment of the Leader of the Opposition insinuates that law enforcement in Northern Ireland is not characterised by

"methods . . . which are seen to be fair, compassionate and non-discriminatory."

That is a defamation not only of the Government, but of the security forces who dare and endure so much for us. The Opposition pay lip service to law and order in Northern Ireland, but to make such an assertion in their amendment and to vote for that amendment is a gross disservice to law and order in Northern Ireland.

7.52 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): It is disappointing that, eight months after the production of the Baker report, the Government are not yet able to give their considered reply. The Secretary of State said that he wanted to consider the views of the House, but all that he had to do was to read the debates of six months ago and those of six months before that. The views of the House have not changed. As my views have not changed since my speech on this subject 12 months ago, I shall not delay the House for long.

The debate is about law and order in Northern Ireland and about law and order for the entire community. Death and murder in Northern Ireland are non-sectarian, and more than half the civilian population killed in Northern Ireland have come from the Catholic community. We are all concerned with law and order and how to obtain it. We differ about the means.

The differences between us are genuine and I believe that law and order in any democratic society is based on political consensus. There is no democratic society that is not based on political consensus, and law and order must derive from that. When political consensus is absent, there is a serious law and order problem. That is the Achilles heel which can be exploited by any organisation. We must search for a society and framework of government that will be supported by the entire community ; that will give it the strength to deal with anyone who wants to move outside the democratic process.

When I ask the Secretary of State questions about what happened in my streets on Friday, when the security forces shot two people, I am trying to uphold the rule of law. In doing that, I am upholding the democratic process. When we abandon the rule of law, whether for terrorists or anyone else, we are playing into the hands of the terrorist organisations. It is remarkable that we have still not had a statement from the Government about the facts of that incident. That is all that anyone has ever asked for. It is important that we know what happened.

Would any hon. Member tell me that if members of the security forces operating as undercover agents in plain clothes shot two anybodies dead on the streets of Leeds or London there would not be an immediate statement in the House?

It is vital that we know that the rule of law is being upheld and that we are not engaging in a shoot-to-kill policy. That would have serious implications for our community and its future. It seems from the remarks of some hon. Members that they would approve of a shoot-to-kill policy.

The search for law and order is the search for political consensus. When there is no such consensus to provide peace and stability, the law is bent and stretched , and that is what is happening in Northern Ireland. The Northern

Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 is an example of how the law is being bent and stretched. When that happens, there is a grave danger of promoting those who want to destroy the rule of law.

It is wrong that people can be arrested without reasonable suspicion. Anyone arrested by the police or the security forces should be arrested on the ground that there is reasonable suspicion that he is engaged in doing something unlawful. It is intolerable that a confession extracted by blackmail or intimidation should be accepted in a court of law, but that is what happens under the 1978 Act. Only confessions that can be proved to have been extracted by torture or inhuman or degrading treatment are not acceptable. Confessions extracted by intimidation or blackmail are admissible under the Act.

Reference has been made to the delays in bringing people to trial. That matter requires urgent attention. As has been said, one person has served the equivalent of a six-year sentence on the evidence of three or four supergrasses who have since withdrawn their evidence against him. But that man is still in prison.

The Act is being used for the collection of information instead of for the purpose of bringing people to trial and justice. Two priests in Northern Ireland said last week that young people going to a police station should be accompanied by somebody. That brought a howl of protest, but there is much evidence from the application of the Act to support what they were saying. Since the Act came into operation, about 60,000 people have been arrested for questioning in Northern Ireland. About 90 per cent. of them have never been charged with anything and about 70 per cent. were not even asked about specific actions in which they were supposed to be involved. I have to conclude that the Act is being used for gathering information and for pressurising people into giving information, rather than for arresting people for crimes and bringing them to justice. When those figures are applied to a specific age group within a specific section of the population it can be understood why I suggest that support is being created for more extreme attitudes and for a loss of faith in the democratic process.

It has been seriously suggested that the supergrass operation — it is called the accomplice operation in Northern Ireland — is similar to what happens on this side of the Irish sea. That is utter dishonesty. To bring 35 people to trial on the word of one person, who is described by the Lord Chief Justice as a liar, hardly does credit to any system of justice. Thirty five people were held in custody for 18 months on the basis of that evidence— the Director of Public Prosecutions approved of those charges being brought — yet the DPP decided to do nothing in the McCabe case. One is therefore entitled to ask how respect for the rule of law is to be maintained.

In the McCabe case, a woman out shopping in the morning was killed by a plastic bullet. The police, led by a chief superintendent, gave very detailed evidence to the inquest as to what had happened, but when their evidence was over it was revealed to their surprise that more evidence existed in the form of a film of what had happened. The inquest was adjourned. A detective inspector of the RUC was appointed to investigate the film and what had actually happened. As a result of his investigation, the inquest decided that a completely innocent woman had been killed. The police accepted responsibility in a private, unpublished settlement of compensation to her husband, and the conclusion drawn from the film and from the detective inspector's investigation was that the evidence of the RUC members present, including that of the chief superintendent, was a complete tissue of lies.

When someone gives false evidence under oath, we call that perjury, and it is an offence. A criminal act was also committed. The DPP, supported by the Attorney-General, has decided that no further action will be taken. Hon. Members should compare that with putting 35 people in gaol for 18 months on the word of a man whom the Lord Chief Justice described as a liar. Can they then ask me to tell people to have respect for the system of justice in Northern Ireland?

We question such matters because we stand for the rule of law and for a decent application of the system of justice in order to undermine those who say that it is not possible to achieve that by peaceful and democratic means. I join hon. Members on both sides of the House who have expressed a hope that the Secretary of State will give an early reply to the request from Sir George Baker to make a policy statement on young prisoners who are held at the Secretary of State's pleasure. I acknowledge the efforts made by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), in that regard, as he has made a beginning. When he has heard the unanimous opinion of the House that we want to see a policy and compassion, I hope he will agree that there is no need for delay and that we should get on with the job.

This problem will not be solved by military or security means, because it is not a security or military problem, but a political one. It is a problem about how people live together and about how they agree on a framework for living together. From that will derive the basis for any order. Indeed, people only agree to be governed so that they can have a system of order. Tragically, we seem to disagree about that, and that is at the root of all our problems. In the past 12 months my party, together with other parties in Ireland, has made a serious effort to put forward an analysis of the problem, but the Prime Minister's response would seem to show that she does not think that the problem is serious enough to put all its aspects on the table for discussion. I should have thought that, with a problem as serious as that of Northern Ireland, everything should be put on the table for discussion to see whether it can be solved.

The Prime Minister's response would seem to imply that sovereignty is an immutable principle when it comes to the problems of Northern Ireland. Yet in other areas, when that sovereignty stands in the way of bigger problems, it is not an immutable principle. It can be softened, fudged, or whatever, if necessary. In this world there is no such thing as a sovereign state. We live in a very inter-dependent world. In our membership of the EEC our sovereignty has been pooled with that of nine other countries in order to deal with larger problems. Recently, we have had the example of Gibraltar, but perhaps the best example is that, because there is felt to be a nuclear threat, sovereignty has been conceded to an American President who can press a button which could destroy the entire human race. Americans can put their missiles on this country's soil. That is a surrender of sovereignty because of a belief that there are larger problems to be solved.

I believe that the Irish problem is such that there should be no immutable principles to stand in the way of examining how we can produce an agreed manner in which

[Mr. John Hume]

the people of that island can live together. Then, and only then, shall we have the sort of law and order that every hon. Member wants.

8.5 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I do not know how other hon. Members feel about this debate, but I feel a sense of hopelessness and despair. We have had this debate for so long. It may have been couched in different terms, but it is essentially the same debate. The report and the debate say loud and clear that there is no solution and that we should settle for going on and on for ever, because the problem is intractable and there is nowhere to go.

I cannot share that point of view. Indeed, I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) on this issue. As he well knows, I respect him deeply. We are good friends and have been ever since I came to the House. He says that he feels greatly irked when he hears people say that there is a military solution—that irks me too—and that there is a political solution. I do not know what the political solution is and it is not on the horizon, but I know that the solution is political, and has to be. Ultimately, it will be political, because there is no other way.

All of us have something in common. We are against acts of terrorism that slaughter and maim innocent people, many of whom do not even know that they are involved in any way. On occasion I have quarrelled with my own people when I have said that before the troops are withdrawn there must be a political set-up there. That political set-up must give birth to the withdrawal, because withdrawal does not precede such a solution. I respect the views of those who think differently, but that is my view.

The opening words of the report are damning. They say quite bluntly that the situation will go on. They say:

"Accepting that Temporary Emergency Powers are necessary to combat sustained terrorist violence".

The report then goes on to say more or less that the violence will never end and that we must have security for ever and ever. I do not know the judge but I profoundly disagree with him. I have heard lovely things said about him. He may be a gentle, sweet and kindly man, but he was wrong. I know that he did his best, but he got things all wrong. He had to conclude—he had no choice—that the emergency powers had to continue. I do not think that. We are moving — many in my party believe what I believe——

Mr. Michael Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flannery: I shall not give way as I want to speak for only 10 minutes. I am sorry, but we do not want hon. Members going on for 34 minutes, as one of our colleagues did.

The judge then proceeded in the most orthodox manner to endorse all the most offensive provisions in the Act — the admission of involuntary confessions in court, non-jury trials, supergrasses, uncorroborated evidence, lengthy periods of detention for questioning without charge, internment, and arrest on grounds of suspicion. I have nothing in common with matters of that sort. The Northern Ireland problem will be sustained indefinitely, just like a conflagration, unless we stop thinking that this is a security problem, important though that is, and get down to the nitty-gritty of the political problem that we all face.

The whole report is permeated with a belief that somehow security will prevent terrorism and solve the intractable problem of Northern Ireland. It will not. We shall be here for ever if that mentality permeates us as it permeates the report. There must be a political solution.

During my time in the House I have had no harsh words with colleagues, either behind me or on the Conservative Benches. I have always said that I dread anything happening to any of them, and I honourably and sincerely do. It would be ghastly if such a thing occurred. However, the stubborn refusal of Unionist leaders to believe the reality of a political solution means that the killing and maiming will continue indefinitely. Just as surely as Hong Kong must return to China, and just as surely as the British Empire had to be dismantled, so will this last foothold of Britain's imperial past one day have to be rejoined with its real motherland, a united Ireland. Unionist leaders will have to come to terms with that reality, just as my party has come to terms with it in the last few years. To deny that is not merely stubborn obstinacy which will result in such reports being produced again and again, but it is a denial of reality. This report will go into the dustbin of history just as surely as I am standing here tonight.

I wish to refer to one major piece of foolishness that Baker upholds and which is in the process of imminent collapse. My hon. Friends and I have repeatedly condemned the disgraceful use of supergrasses. As I have often said, the supergrass system is a violation of both natural and legal justice. It is one of a group of tyrannical last resorts of a system which is patently unworkable. The Six Counties have never been ruled without emergency measures, but those measures are now more concentrated in this Act. The Six Counties were purloined from Ireland by force of arms and the implied threat of armed force in 1922. Some Unionists have said that they do not believe in armed force, yet they drew a line around the Six Counties, with their inbuilt Protestant majority, and they have held them ever since by force of arms and threats to the Irish people.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said that there is democracy in Northern Ireland. During the war I lived in India for many years. I saw areas where the Muslims were dominant and where the Hindus were held in subjection. The Muslims said that that was democratic because they were in the majority. The same was true of Hindu areas. However, they were two different communities.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North has often pointed out that his community is numerically larger. That is not the consensus about which my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) spoke. So long as the hon. Member for Antrim, North holds that undemocratic attitude and counts heads in the different communities, so long will this terrible problem endure.

The lack of any real democracy to uphold this synthetic state is the real cause of the fundamental problem. So long as we continue to pretend that there are not two distinct communities in the Six Counties, when clearly there are, we are bound to have a political and literal explosion——

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon.

Member who has just come into the precincts of the Chamber to refer to hon. Members as "animals" from outside the Bar of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): What happens beyond the Bar of the House is beyond my responsibility. I did not hear it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) was referring to me. I was listening to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), and I distinctly heard the hon. Member for Belfast, East and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) say that people should be eliminated in Northern Ireland. I found that remark offensive, and I made that response.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member who was not in the House to misrepresent an hon. Member who had actually said that the Protestants were eliminated from the south of Ireland? Everyone knows that before partition the number of Protestants in the south of Ireland was 10 per cent. of the population, whereas it is now only 2 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That happened beyond my hearing.

Mr. Flannery: I thought that hon. Members were shouting at me, but I am perfectly harmless. I did not need the defence of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), because I know the two hon. Members too well and am aware of the things they say.

There is something morally and socially wrong about an informer, especially when he is a perjured murderer, taking money from the Special Branch to live a high life. In a previous supergrass trial the judge said that such a creature was an excellent witness, yet that witness was a perjured murderer who had tried to gain money from divulging the names of people with whom he had worked and killed. How in heaven's name can we justify that and say that we believe in honour and justice?

This tells us a lot about those people, including Sir George Baker—I am sad that he is dead—who uphold such methods. It says more about them than it can possibly say about those whom murderers and rogues such as Gilmour expose. This system was pregnant with collapse from its inception. I am staggered to believe that even now in this Chamber there are those who try to defend it and believe that there was a victory for justice by what the judge did. It was obvious that Gilmour was a rogue and a liar, and the judge would have been impugned had he not freed all the defendants.

Among those defendants might have been some people who were guilty of these things, but this nonsensical system forced the judge to free them all. That must surely herald the final collapse of the system.

There is now an attempt, which has appeared in many of today's newspapers, to suggest that by some convoluted method of thought the supergrass system is an upholder of real justice. What tortuous nonsense that is.

Britain has had to reconsider many cases involving a forensic expert where people were gaoled even though innocent. Similary, all the trials in Northern Ireland that involve supergrasses should be considered afresh. Innocent people may be languishing in gaol. With supergrasses giving evidence, there is a danger that innocent people are rotting in gaol and thinking, "What kind of justice is this when I have done nothing wrong but I am in gaol because of a perjured murderer?" They will hate us in the same way as we would hate any regime that gaoled us without cause.

We should all reject the findings of the report because they are fundamentally wrong. The sense of despair and hopelessness in the report will make matters worse. It puts forward security as a solution, yet the real solution must be political.

8.19 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) believes that Sir George Baker was wrong. On one aspect at least, he was right. He said that

"history has so often two or more faces."

Having heard the hon. Gentleman's account of history, it is quite clear that it has more than one face. He attempted to deceive the House into believing that the map of Northern Ireland was arbitrarily drawn without consultation with anyone south or north of the border. In fact, the boundary of Northern Ireland was drawn by tripartite agreement. It was agreed by a majority vote in this House, in the Dail and in Stormont. Following that, a tripartite agreement was signed in the League of Nations. Yet the hon. Gentleman would have the House believe that it was an arbitrary decision and that Northern Ireland is being retained as part of the United Kingdom by the pressure and arms of the British Army.

The hon. Gentleman said that the answer to the problems must be political and not military. He said that he was hurt by the suggestion that there should be a military solution. He may be hurt again before I sit down because that is exactly the proposition that I shall put forward later.

It ill becomes the hon. Gentleman to suggest that it is the stubbornness of Unionist leaders to recognise a political solution that brings us to the present position. In fact, the Unionist leaders, even though they do not believe that a political solution will ultimately solve the overall problem, are still trying to achieve such a solution. It is the nationalist leaders who are refusing to talk. It is the stubbornness not of Unionist leaders, but of those whom the hon. Gentleman supports that is causing difficulty in reaching a political solution—[*Interruption.*] Does the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who is babbling incoherently from a sedentary position, wish to intervene?

Although I do not agree with every word in the Baker report, it is a thorough, useful and detailed examination of the problems of terrorism in Northern Ireland. It is a careful and considered report. My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and I were privileged to meet Sir George, and we made known our views both orally and in writing. The House is right to pay tribute to his work.

On page 9 of his report, Baker identified the purpose of many of those who attack the emergency provisions Act. He states:

"There are others who attack the EPA, the security forces and the legal process including the judges and the courts, not for the

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

ultimate purpose of preserving human rights and liberties but for sinister reasons. Any law for the protection of the people would be a target."

When I hear people outside the House attacking the Act, I fear that it is not because they concern themselves with the liberties of the individual, but because they wish to protect those who attack individuals in Northern Ireland who are much maligned and in danger.

The report refers to the broad security policy and Baker states what he believes and understands to be the aim of Government policy — to end terrorist crime from whatever source through the effect and impartial application of the law. The hon. Member for Hillsborough is right in saying that Sir George Baker painted a gloomy picture. Paragraph 37 of the report states:

"it would be foolish to assume that the terrorists may not retain a significant capability to carry out crimes of violence, at least for the near future . . . There are no grounds for forecasting significant changes in the existing pattern or targets of its attacks."

Is it not an indictment of the Government's security policies that someone who reviews the procedures of the control of terrorism says that there is no light at the end of the tunnel? The security policies of this and past Governments have failed and have been seen to fail. They must change that policy and produce a resolute military initiative. The hon. Member for Hillsborough may well be irked now, but that is the only way to defeat the Provisional IRA. The rebellion will not be cooled and the IRA will not be persuaded by the eloquence of the Government's request to put away their guns. They will be defeated only militarily.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman outline a resolute military policy and initiative?

Mr. Robinson: I could do that in considerable detail, and give the hon. Gentleman books that we have published on the subject. Unlike some hon. Members who make bland statements about defeating terrorism, we have detailed what should be done to defeat it. The first priority is having the will to win. Sometimes I wonder how real the will is to defeat terrorism. People in Great Britain are often not prepared to pay the price that they may have to pay to turn the screw on the IRA. The greatest example of the Government's lack of will to deal with security in Northern Ireland may be seen in their treatment of Sinn Fein. If they had the resolve to defeat terrorism, they would take it on in all its shapes and forms, including Sinn Fein. I intend to return to that point, so I shall not transgress, although the hon. Gentleman may tempt me to do so.

Sir George Baker makes it clear that there is a warning for this and future Governments. It is contained in paragraph 35 of his report. It states:

"The main sources from which protection is required are the PIRA and the INLA. Loyalist terrorism now is very much reactive . . . I have been warned by many not to under-rate the danger and potential of Protestant terrorism. I bear that in mind with a further warning that the anger in the community which suffers the brunt of PIRA/INLA attacks must never be underestimated. Church leaders have emphasised to me that the extent of forgiveness by some of those who have suffered is indeed remarkable. I would comment that this is a Christian virtue which cannot be expected to endure forever."

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should not be under the illusion that the Protestant community will for ever turn the cheek when it is under attack from PIRA violence.

Like the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), I take it ill that an hon. Member should allow into the precincts of the House those who have engaged in PIRA activities and who still espouse the cause of terrorism. Hon. Members who take such a line, no doubt to ingratiate themselves with the Irish electorate in their constituencies, should attend the funerals and visit the widows and children of the victims of the people whom they bring into the House. Then they may think again before they engage in such an activity.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone rightly commented about paragraph 64 of the report. Sir George Baker deals with the position, which thankfully does not occur often, of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who find themselves on remand or in prison. I have visited RUC members imprisoned in Crumlin road gaols. The Secretary of State should know that those officers in prison are in great danger. They do not have the support of the para-military organisations. They cannot expect anyone to help them if a fight breaks out, and they are often, if not always, the targets of attack by not only the Provisional IRA and the INLA but by Protestant para-militaries.

Not only the person in prison but his visitors are in danger. They are immediately singled out by the relatives of the para-militaries as being the friends, associates or relatives of an RUC member. If a pattern emerges of their visiting behaviour, they can become easy targets. As the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone said, they are the objects of much abuse and ridicule when they visit their friends or relatives in prison. I have told the Minister of State that security officers are often held in solitary confinement. I hope that he will accept the recommendation of Sir George Baker and include the RUC and its reserve in the section mentioned in the report.

Another matter that several hon. Members believed it right to mention was the position of those young people who are serving sentences at the pleasure of the Secretary of State. I have met the families of many of those people. It is extremely sad, because those people, who were only children when they committed offences, are unable to plan their future lives. The youngsters have no hope because they do not know when their sentences will be terminated, and their families cannot plan for the future because they do not know when their sons or brothers will come out of prison. Many of those people have served sentences of more than 10 years.

I met the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—the hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott)—last week. He told me that in the new year a pattern would begin to emerge from which we might be able to assess what would happen to SOSPs. I considered all the SOSP cases where there has been release, but I cannot find the slightest glimmer of a pattern. I hope that when the Minister replies he will tell us about the nature of the pattern. Is it that after a person has served part of his sentence he is told that he can expect release? Is the pattern that, if he removes himself from the compound system at the Maze and asks to be put in a cellular block, that will be a first step on the way to release? The Secretary of State or the Minister must

tell us about this. At any rate, the Secretary of State must make the clear statement that is asked for in Sir George Baker's report.

The most fundamental principle of justice is that an accused man should have a trial within a reasonable time. Many of my constituents are in the third year of their remand period and still do not know their date of trial. No hon. Member could defend that. Those people have been charged with crimes that are unlikely to attract sentences of more than twice the period that they have already served. Therefore, taking account of remission, they have already served the full sentence that they would have received if they had been found guilty of the crime.

I agree to some extent with the recommendation in paragraph 185 that, after 12 months, under one set of circumstances at least—where it is the responsibility of the prosecution that delay has occurred—there should be release. Naturally, in the circumstances described by the Secretary of State, when the reason for the delay is that the prisoner is being choosy about his counsel, one could not expect that the prisoner should be released after 12 months. If the cause of the delay is that either the security forces or the DPP are compiling the necessary details for the prosecution, and finding that witnesses are difficult to bring forward, there is ample justification for the recommendation.

I move now to the proscription of the IRA. I have read with considerable interest the many remarks in the report linking Sinn Fein with the IRA, and the evidence is overwhelming. To any impartial individual, there would not be the slightest doubt that Sinn Fein and the IRA are one and the same animal. There is documentary evidence to that effect, which I have quoted in another debate. A document was found in the flat of Seamus Twomey, which shows the structure of the IRA. It said:

> "Sinn Fein should come under Army organisers at all levels . . . Sinn Fein should be radicalised (under army direction) . . . SF should be directed to infiltrate other organizations to win support for, and sympathy to, the movement . . . It gains the respect of the people which in turn leads to increased support for the cell."

Clearly there is no distinction between Sinn Fein and the IRA. The speeches by Danny Morrison and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) are in support of the murderous activities of the IRA.

Will the Secretary of State consider the position of Unionist councillors in particular at the moment? I can give him one example. In Belfast city council, one of my party colleagues, councillor Billy Dickson, has to sit opposite two Sinn Fein members at every meeting of the city council. They gloried the night that the IRA pumped eight bullets into him and also placed a bomb outside his home so that the security forces, when they came to investigate the event, would have been blown up and there would have been further loss of life. Yet he has to sit opposite people who support such activity, and may even do more than support it. People in the Sinn Fein organisation may be politicians by day—who knows but that they are terrorists at night? The least that can be said for the process of proscribing Sinn Fein is that it would perform an act of political hygiene in Northern Ireland politics.

The local government elections in May of next year will see the entrance into the district councils of Northern Ireland of dozens of Sinn Fein representatives. The House would not for one moment accept an hon. Member, sitting on whatever side of the House, who had been responsible for condoning the killing of hon. Members, such as Sir Anthony Berry, Airey Neave and the Reverend Robert Bradford. If hon. Members were faced with such circumstances, they would think long and hard before rejecting the proscribing of such an organisation.

Sir George Baker makes it clear that the UDA should not be proscribed, and then examines Sinn Fein. If he had thought that Sinn Fein should not be proscribed, he would have said what he was prepared to say about the UDA, but he did not. Sir George Baker makes a strange statement that it is a political decision, that there is a conference occurring between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Republic and that he will leave the matter to those in another council. I wonder what gave Sir George Baker the impression that this matter was considered mutually between the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the Republic of Ireland.

Sir George Baker endorses the suggestion that, before an election occurs, candidates should take an oath that they renounce violence. If that step was taken, the complexion of our elections would be different. If the Secretary of State is not prepared to go the logical way of proscribing Sinn Fein, he could surely consider that avenue.

I say, as I have said at six-month intervals since I became a Member, that the ritual of considering the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act is likely to continue. The people of Northern Ireland have no joy in thinking of any legislation that limits or restricts their liberties. They recognise that the protection of an individual's rights must come second to the protection of a society. It is the society in Northern Ireland that is under attack.

I conclude with the words used correctly by Sir George Baker:

> "The remedy is squarely in the hands of those who say they are waging war. Let them forswear violence and respect the right to live."

8.41 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Not having spoken previously in the House in a debate on the affairs of Northern Ireland, I am bound to say that to hear this debate is a profoundly depressing experience: depressing because the violence seems to be continuing without point and without end; depressing because soldiers and police officers are still having to draw on all their reserves of courage; and depressing because violence in Northern Ireland has now become institutionalised so that tomorrow I suspect that the press will be seen to have virtually ignored this important debate.

I join those who have paid tribute to Sir George Baker. On occasions I had the privilege of appearing before Sir George when he was a judge in court. He was a judge who was characterised by equal measures of sharpness of mind and courtesy. Even among judges, equality of those attributes is rare.

I wish to comment particularly on some of the aspects of the Baker report dealing with the nature of the courts hearing criminal trials, and with the quality of the evidence that is placed before those courts. Before dealing with specific matters, it is as well to remind myself, and possibly some hon. Members, that the legal system which is meant to operate in Northern Ireland is the same common law based legal system that operates in England and Wales—the common law of England. It is not by any means an infallible system, but it has stood the test of

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time. It is certainly a good deal less fallible than half of the common law of England, which is effectively what operates in some of the criminal courts in Northern Ireland.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) that it is regrettable that Sir George Baker's terms of reference were so limited and so restricted that he was not asked to investigate whether temporary emergency legislation was effective or even necessary. I believe that those who face the worst problems caused by the violence in Northern Ireland, those who face daily the prospect of death because of that violence—the citizens of Northern Ireland, the police and the armed forces who have to attempt to keep order in those circumstances—deserve a more wide-ranging investigation than Sir George Baker was able to carry out, because his terms of reference were so restricted.

While at present I accept the need for the type of legislation under consideration tonight, the absence of any independent and ongoing monitoring of the operation of the legislation is a matter of great anxiety. From time to time there have been reports on the circumstances in Northern Ireland, and reports upon the prevention of terrorism provisions applicable to Great Britain; but, as yet, no effort has been made openly and continuously to scrutinise whether such legislation is needed. As a result, much of the evidence—even the evidence in as careful a report as the Baker report, and even bearing in mind the long list of distinguished witnesses and bodies giving evidence which appears at the end of the report—is anecdotal or based upon opinion; and we all know how opinion is the prisoner of imagination.

Although today I feel that it is necessary for the emergency provisions to continue, unless some ongoing scrutiny is provided, and unless the House is given more open and more reliable evidence, beyond anecdote, of the effect of the provisions, it will become more and more difficult to support such legislation. Violence for political ends is a hateful contempt of freedom and justice; and such emergency powers are, to an extent, a denial of freedom and justice. Before we perpetuate such denials of freedom and justice, limited perhaps though they be, it is essential that a more coherent and persuasive body of evidence is available to the House.

I do not believe that it can be gainsaid that the powers contained in the emergency provisions legislation have had a drastic effect upon the common law of England as it has been applied in Northern Ireland since the provisions first came into force.

I am gratified by many of the Secretary of State's remarks made in his characteristically thoughtful and careful way. It is good to hear that changes will be made in line with at least some of the recommendations of the Baker report, although one is bound to be anxious as to whether the Secretary of State was committing himself to go all the way with Baker.

I shall give just a few examples of the way in which the common law has indeed been drastically affected by the emergency provisions. We hear of trials with more than 20 defendants. There has been a great deal of discussion in the past few days about the Gilmour trial. I disagree with the Secretary of State. I do not for one moment believe that a multiplicity of defendants shortens the trial of all those defendants when one considers the matter overall. Trials of 35 defendants would no longer be allowed in Great Britain. One has only to look at the fiasco of the Bristol riots case some time ago to see how the experience of multiple-defendant trials has been extremely unhappy in England and Wales.

I venture to suggest to the Secretary of State, with all the force that I can command, that a much more just judicial system operates if one has a few defendants only in trials; and if the trials are broken into small parts and are thus shorter. If the Secretary of State believes that 20-plus defendant trials will produce justice, he is sadly deluding himself.

The Bail Act 1976, applicable to England and Wales, contains the presumption that the person who has been charged is entitled to bail. The onus is upon the Crown to prove that the person should not have bail. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, section 2, reverses that presumption. Section 2 is such a "belt and braces operation" that, as Sir George Baker points out, section 2(4) is wholly meaningless. It provides that a right of appeal is not prejudiced, but such a right of appeal has never existed. It seems extraordinary that such a provision has existed for so long.

In England and Wales, the only mode of trial on indictment has been by jury. I deplore the talk that that might be changed in certain cases. I hope that we shall see no decline in England and Wales of the right to jury trial for those on indictment.

There is no right at all to jury trial in Northern Ireland for scheduled offences. Indeed, there is no possibility of jury trial for such offences, save in certain restricted circumstances under schedule 4. It is important to remember that jury trial has been withdrawn for many non-terrorist offences. Many robbery cases have no terrorist connection: they could be tried in Northern Ireland as justly by jury as anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): How else can trials be held and perverse verdicts be avoided other than under the present system? Jurors have shown that they are not prepared to convict accused persons who share their religion or where they are liable to be nobbled.

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman has raised a fair point, but if he hears me out he will find that I am not saying that Diplock courts should not exist. I am arguing that Diplock courts should be used only in restricted circumstances. They should not be used—there is no justification for doing so—in cases of ordinary crime with no terrorist connection. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would not disagree with that view. I should be surprised if he did.

I note from schedule 4 that one of the scheduled categories of offence is that of assault occasioning actual bodily harm. Those of us who know the law, or some of it at least, are aware that offences of actual bodily harm are tried daily in magistrates' courts throughout England and Wales. When the Secretary of State comes to consider in detail the descheduling of offences, I hope that he will go much further than he appears to have done so far. Indeed, I hope that he will go beyond Sir George Baker's recommendations and will seek to deschedule wherever possible.

However, I am bound to accept that there is a residual category of case, but only that, and that the Diplock courts may have to continue for reasons which have been

discussed on many occasions. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider three-judge rather than one-judge courts. I accept that there are manpower problems, but alterative arrangements could be made, possibly by the introduction of judges from across the water to try civil cases in Northern Ireland. By that means it might be possible to have three-judge criminal trials in whatever system succeeds the Diplock courts.

One of the problems of the Diplock courts is that of delay. Trial delay is so great that false confession is often the short way to release. If someone is arrested and is faced with the choice of trial in a Diplock court, possibly two or three years after the date of arrest, or a quick hearing of a guilty plea, the chances are that he will decide to make a false confession, plead guilty and be released earlier. That cannot be an acceptable system of justice within the United Kingdom.

Section 8 as now drawn makes it very likely that tainted confessions will be allowed in evidence in Northern Ireland. Indeed, that must have occurred in many trials because of the restricted nature of section 8, to which the Secretary of State fairly referred. I have examined in great detail Sir George Baker's alternative section 8, and it is a valiant effort to produce something that is fair. Nevertheless, Sir George Baker's section 8 also leaves the great risk—indeed, the certainty, in my view—that tainted confessions will continue to be given in evidence in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State and I, and several others, spent many hours—many all too forgettable hours—discussing in great detail the admissibility of confessions in relation to what is now, sadly, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. I cannot for the life of me see why the same provisions as are now contained in that Act should not apply in relation to confessions in Northern Ireland. I say to the Secretary of State that a tainted confession is a tainted confession is a tainted confession. The risk of tainted confessions continuing to be a matter of course in courts in Northern Ireland will in no way be diluted if the Baker recommendation on section 8 is adopted.

The final example that I should like to give of injustices that can arise under the present Act relates to powers of arrest, though I take it that the Secretary of State—I hope that I understand him aright — is prepared to introduce the requirement of "reasonable suspicion" into powers of arrest where now all that is needed is "suspicion", whether reasonable or not.

Supergrass trials have been mentioned in the debate, not surprisingly. Many hon. Members have great misgivings about supergrass trials. Lord Lowry, in his courageous decision in the Gilmour case, exposed the danger of supergrass trials. With respect, I do not believe that the Secretary of State has really got the point about them. Whereas in England and Wales the Director of Public Prosecutions will allow a case to go to court only if he believes that the evidence of an informer is not only credible and cogent, but, in practice, to some extent at least corroborated, knowing full well that in any event he has to satisfy the tests that will be set by a jury—nobody sets standards better than a jury when it comes to judging evidence—in Northern Ireland, the Director of Public Prosecutions knows that the trial will not be heard by a jury. He knows that he does not have to satisfy the diverse but telling demands made by a jury when it examines the veracity of a witness. He knows that the supergrass class of witness has itself become institutionalised so that acceptance is all too easy.

I take issue with the Secretary of State's statement that the Director in Northern Ireland allows cases to go for trial only if he believes that the evidence is credible and cogent. The fact is that, because of the nature of his office, he has no way of judging whether the evidence of the supergrass is credible and cogent. Only a court can make that judgment. In my view, it is wrong for people to be convicted on the evidence of witnesses more tainted than any ever seen in the past in courts in the United Kingdom, without the advantage of at least some independent corroboration.

Many other issues arising from the Baker report could be considered in detail. I hope that at the least when the Secretary of State produces legislation it will give effect to all the Baker recommendations. That would go some of the way. I consider that the Government's response to the Baker report has been slothful in the extreme. It may be because there has been a change of Secretary of State that there have been delays, but that is no excuse. The Government have been far too slow and have lost the opportunity to place legislation before this Session of Parliament. We should have had the legislation by now.

The common law is a green and fertile field, able to adapt itself to change. The sooner Northern Ireland comes back into the open arms of the common law, the better. I hope that when the legislation is introduced it will hasten that day.

9 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I join the Secretary of State and others in paying sincere tribute to the late Sir George Baker and to the meticulous way in which he prepared and submitted his report.

It was enlightening to read in paragraph 21 that during his many visits to the Province

"to get the 'feel' of the overall situation"

Sir George found that

"for the most part Northern Ireland is a peaceful and pleasant land in which to live and work."

That opinion is shared by almost everyone who has visited the Province, and I am pleased that it has been recognised that life goes on fairly normally and that the Government have acted responsibly in their support and provision for the needs of the Province.

The report covers a very wide range of issues. If we all made detailed contributions on all those matters, we should be here for far longer than is possible. Therefore, I shall confine my remarks to those aspects of specific concern to my constituency. North Belfast is recognised as one of the most deprived and disturbed areas of the city and includes the equivalent of the Crown court as well as Crumlin road prison, which houses all the remand prisoners of Northern Ireland.

The houses of a large proportion of the Loyalist prisoners are in my constituency, so I am naturally involved in many issues which concern them. In this context, I support the comments of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) about paragraph 35, when he said that Loyalist terrorism was very much reactive. Recent attacks alleged to have emanated from Loyalist para-militaries fully bear out the observation in the report that Loyalists have

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"responded to PIRA and INLA violence by sporadic attacks directed at specific members or supporters of those organisations but also, at random against Catholics."

I never have condoned and never will condone any form of violence from whatever source. I put that on record again today.

Having shared the traumatic experiences of my constituency over the past 15 years, I agree with the statement in paragraph 35 that

"the anger in the community which suffers the brunt of PIRA/INLA attacks must never be underestimated."

I have known many such reactions at first hand, as have many of my colleagues who have spent many days and nights among the community trying to defuse the many situations which threaten the spill-over into uncontrolled physical violence. It is in situations of that kind that one hears the suggestion that there is a great difference between those who act in defence of their country and those who act against it.

Paragraph 163 deals with accomplices — variously described as converted terrorists, informers or supergrasses. In my constituency, this is an extremely emotive issue as so many of those now incarcerated in prison are there on the evidence of such persons. To give credence to the emotion that surrounds this form of evidence, the families of those imprisoned say that those prisoners are there on the evidence of people who have repeatedly taken part in serious criminal activities and have agreed to give evidence for the prosecution against participants in the same crimes.

The word "supergrass" has been used to denote that type of witness for the prosecution. There is no other word with the same meaning. "Accomplice" is a wider word covering anyone who has taken part in a crime. The former is more appropriate to describe those who were working on behalf of the police at the time. "Converted terrorist" —a term used by the police and by representatives of the Government—is only suitable for those who have genuinely repented. It is totally unacceptable that that term should be applied to dangerous and evil men who have undergone convertion for the sole purpose of obtaining immunity, avoiding a long prison sentence, and receiving financial compensation.

We have now been informed that there will be no more immunity from prosecution. However, the suspicion remains that certain steps can still be taken to secure an early release or be given a new identity. I am also deeply concerned about the unduly long and complicated cases, referred to in paragraph 116, where a judge sitting alone has to assess evidence against a large number of people — perhaps between 30 and 50. It would seem impracticable that one man should have to give judgment against such a large number of people in trials lasting for six months or more. That is borne out in paragraph 172, which states:

"I share the doubts of some witnesses about the wisdom of having so many defendants, so many charges, such delay in starting and such long trials."

It is recommended in the review that efforts should be made to reduce the number of defendants to 20 or fewer and to reduce the delays in starting and the length of the trials. I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State mention the fact that he is considering the appointment of another judge.

In paragraph 164, the report questions whether a person should be convicted on accomplice evidence alone. I maintain that that is totally unsatisfactory, as it could be interpreted as a matter of political expediency rather than of the public interest. There have always been informants, and evidence from such informants has always been accepted, notwithstanding the fact that it was considered as dangerous evidence because there is usually a motive other than the simple desire to tell the truth.

As I drive past the prison, I worry about the fact that so many prisoners are on remand for so long. The problem is partly attributed to the lack of court space and the small number of senior Queen's Counsel involved in many trials. Nevertheless, I agree with the statement in paragraph 174 of the report that the loss of liberty is

"just another form of detention."

In those circumstances, it is impossible to conclude that there is no injustice. Prisoners are sometimes held on remand for two years or more. That causes great stress, particularly on prisoners' wives and children who suffer greater poverty than any other one-parent families, because wives feel that they must provide the prisoner with all the items allowed for by the prison authorities. They already provide clothing, as remand prisoners are not obliged to wear prison uniforms.

The prison houses men from every constituency in Northern Ireland. Many families have to spend nearly a full day travelling in order to visit the prisoner for half an hour. Many families are ostracised by the community because of associated guilt, and so the lengthy remands can cause irreparable harm.

In paragraph 450, in connection with his visit to Crumlin road prison, Sir George mentioned the family centre which provides facilities for people visiting the prison or attending the courts. He is lavish in his praise for the services offered. However, he is not completely accurate when he states that the centre is run by NIACRO. In fact, the project is jointly managed by NIACRO and the Save the Children Fund. Both those organisations should be given credit for their attempts to alleviate the stress occasioned by the visits. I am heartened by Lord Lowry saying in paragraph 170:

"We will accept but one standard of proof in criminal cases, namely, proof beyond reasonable doubt."

That has been borne out by recent events.

9.9 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): This has been an interesting and constructive debate. I must do the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) justice. Although he made a lively speech, I am sure that he wants peace in Ireland. Although I do not agree with his method, speeches that he has made since I have been here are based on his desire for peace. He denounced the Baker report as proposing just more of the same. He should be aware that the terms of reference were, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said, drawn by the Secretary of State, not Sir George Baker, and drawn narrowly. The late Sir George has done a great service to the community in Northern Ireland by examining in detail how the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 has worked. The House can take heart from many of his recommendations.

I cannot add much to what hon. Members who have supported the recommendations have said about delay in bringing cases to trial. Such delay is an injustice. The

recommendation for the release on bail of anyone who is not brought to trial within 12 months should be considered. It is wrong that people should have to wait 12 months and more.

In response to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's challenge, I should like to say that I agree with him about the Baker report's proposals concerning detention. It recommends that section 12 be repealed. We must retain that reserve power, however. I hope that it will never be necessary to use it, but circumstances in which the Secretary of State needs to exercise those powers might arise during the long summer recess, for example.

There is anxiety in Northern Ireland about police complaints. They are necessarily subjective. It is difficult to prove accusations and to confirm what has happened. The report advances the idea of tape recording interrogations. The Government should consider that when framing replacement legislation.

I listened carefully to what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery said about suspicion and reasonable suspicion. His views should be considered by the Government, and the Baker report paid considerable attention to that matter. The report concludes:

"I have become increasingly more convinced that any provision of the EPA which may save even one life or bring even one guilty terrorist to conviction and sentence should be retained until the para-military forces forswear terrorism unless there is a powerful convincing reason for repeal or amendment."

Sadly, the paramilitary forces have yet to forswear terrorism and, therefore, I cannot see any powerful convincing reason why the Act should be repealed or substantially amended.

Sir George said that when the Government bring forward new legislation it should not include the words "emergency provisions" or "prevention of terrorism", and that the Protection of the Peoples Act would be a more acceptable way of showing all parties that we want to leave the circumstances of terrorism and emergency and all that is conjured up by such words. Sir George thought that a subtle change in the title of future legislation should be considered. He said that he was not convinced about the title that he suggested, but we should note his suggestion carefully.

Sir George Baker did a great service to the community of Northern Ireland and I hope that the Government will note many of the constructive comments made from both sides of the House and that it will not be long before legislation embodying many of the suggestions made in our debate is brought before the House.

9.17 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). He followed the debate with interest and made some substantial and important points.

The review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 was announced on 8 April 1983, but it had long been called for, and the Labour party called for such a review in a statement by its national executive committee in 1981. At that time we recommended in a policy document that a review of the Act should be given high priority.

The concern of the Labour party, and of others, which gave rise to that view was based on the unease that was felt that such emergency provisions should lie on our statute book. It was felt that if they must lie on the statute book, not only should they fall within the scrutiny of the House, but they should be the subject of a review and that, following such a review, any recommendations should be considered and, if necessary, acted on.

The Labour party was particularly worried about part II of the Act which deals with powers of arrest, detention and search. Our concern has been reflected from all parts of the House in this debate. We still believe that deprivation of liberty under sections 11 to 14 does not conform with the requirements of article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed, it is noticeable that section 11 exercised the mind of Sir George Baker and gave rise to some recommendations from him. The meat of section 11 lies in subsection (1) which provides that

"any constable may arrest without warrant any person whom he suspects of being a terrorist".

Such a person shall not be detained for more than 72 hours after the arrest.

Some of the objections which Sir George reflected and voiced involved the fact that the power of arrest might be exercised on suspicion rather than on reasonable suspicion —a distinction not immediately apparent to a layman, but certainly apparent to a barrister, and often vital, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) know, in the eyes of a judge.

Sir George's other concern was that detention may be for as long as 72 hours. That also gave some concern to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). Sir George recognised that as the provisions of the ordinary law of arrest were insufficient—that was his conclusion—other such provisions would be required to be codified for Northern Ireland in a new Act. That was one of his recommendations. Another of his recommendations dealt with the extension of the initial holding period of anyone arrested under section 11. He felt that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, or, if not available, one of his junior Ministers, may in any particular case extend the initial holding period by a specified period or periods not exceeding five days in all.

Sir George also felt that the powers of arrest for scheduled offences and offences under the prevention of terrorism and the emergency provisions Acts should be all part of one and the same Act for Northern Ireland. Others, too, have expressed their concern at the powers of section 11. Indeed, they were referred to earlier by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West.

A summary of evidence from the Cobden Trust's research on the operation of the emergency legislation in Northern Ireland, which was presented to Sir George Baker, revealed that section 11 was not being used for the purpose for which it was intended and endorsed by Parliament — that is, as the precursor to internment. Indeed, 72 per cent. of the Cobden sample of people held under the emergency legislation in 1981 were not questioned about any specific offence. A high percentage were clearly not suspected of involvement in any specific offence, but were detained solely for the purpose of information gathering.

Again, according to the Cobden Trust's written evidence, 90 per cent. of the arrests under the emergency legislation do not result in charges being preferred. In his report Sir George confirms that figure for a 10-month period in 1980, but asks the pointed question whether there could be a solution that avoids the alienation of the

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minority community while at the same time enables the RUC to take as effective action as possible to stamp out terrorism.

It is pertinent to ask whether it is true that arrests are made for the purpose of information gathering. Those are the allegations of academic writers as well as of the Cobden Trust, in claiming that arrests are frequently made not only to gather information but low-grade intelligence at that and that the power of arrest is all part and parcel of the surveillance and harassment that is inherent in the powers of the emergency provisions legislation.

Those suspects in the Cobden sample had not, it is true, been physically abused, but they were insulted, threatened, offered bribes and denied access to their solicitors. Indeed, 48 per cent. declared that they were subjected to obscenities and insults about themselves or their families, while 38 per cent. claimed that pressure was put on them to pass on information to the police. Again, 19 per cent. declared that they were asked about their political views.

It is true that none alleged physical abuse, but 76 per cent. of those in the Cobden sample who asked to see their solicitors were refused access, and none saw his solicitor within 48 hours. The common law appears to be suspended when it comes to Northern Ireland. Viscount Simon, in the well-known case of Christie v. Lleachinsky, declared that "a citizen is entitled to know on what charge or suspicion of what crime he is seized".
That is not so in Northern Ireland under the emergency provisions legislation. It is sufficient, as Baker points out, to say that there is an arrest under section 11 on the ground that the person is suspected of being a terrorist.

The word "reasonable" to which I referred earlier would convert what is in effect a subjective test into an objective one recognised by common law jurisprudence. The lack of the word simply means that if there is an honest, genuine suspicion — without any reasoning, proof or straws in the wind to back it up—a court cannot inquire further as to whether the arrest was lawful.

In this instance, I am reminded of the powers of the French juge d'instruction, which is so alien to our own concepts of justice, who can arrest and incarcerate on the principles of an intimate conviction of the guilt of the person he wishes to accuse. That principle is now regarded with some unease in France, let alone in our own country, yet here we find it entrenched in legislation for Northern Ireland. I am not entirely sure what the man on the Clapham omnibus would think of such a lack of reasonableness, but I am sure that many hon. Members would feel a certain disquiet if any of their constituents were so held.

It is fair to add that Sir George Baker points out that he has no evidence to suggest that suspicion, as against reasonable suspicion, has been a factor in a decision to use section 11 for the purposes of arrest. Nevertheless, he concluded that resonable suspicion should be required when a constable arrests without warrant, and recommended that this should be included in the new arrest powers which he proposes in substitution for section 1(1) and section 13(1).

The Army also has powers of arrest. Section 14 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act allows soldiers to arrest anyone suspected of committing any offence. Such persons may be held for four hours. This was introduced at a time of no-go areas, when the police could not enter certain vicinities in certain districts. The four hours were intended to give the Army time to identify the person and to transfer him or her to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. There never was an intention to confer a power of interrogation upon the Army, but this power has exercised the mind of Sir George Baker, who has had to consider whether it contravenes article 5 of the European convention and article 9 of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The criticisms of these powers are legion. There is the criticism of reasonable suspicion; that the concept of any offence is too wide; that the arrested person should be told in plain language of the offence to which his arrest refers; that few arrested persons are actually handed over to the RUC; that four hours is too long; that the power is arbitrary and is used for harassment, intelligence gathering, screening and indiscriminate house searches; that the questioning should be limited; and that the power of the Army should be to arrest only when under police control.

Earlier the Secretary of State said that the support of the Army had been unstinting and unswerving. Sir George points out in his report that the supporting role of the Army is to deal with a situation which has been described as
"the worst protracted, the most lethal, and the most destructive, of any experienced by any Western European country since 1945".
However, he takes on board the criticism that this section does not accord with article 5 of the European convention and, therefore, recommends the addition of the word "reasonable" as an adjunct to suspicion. The Standing Commission on Human Rights also believes the wording of section 14 is too wide. Sir George therefore recommends a change of the wording to the arrest of a person by a member of the armed forces
"whom he reasonably suspects of being a terrorist or a member of a proscribed organisation or of committing, having committed or being about to commit any act of terrorism or violence or of rioting or an offence involving the use of an explosive, explosive substance or firearm, or of making or possessing a petrol bomb."

The common law of the land for England and Wales—I believe that this writ should run in Northern Ireland—is that a person is prima facie entitled to his freedom and is required to submit to restraints on that freedom only if he knows in substance the reason why it is claimed that the restraint should be imposed.

The word "alienation" appears in the Baker report. It is frequently used by other commentators. There are those in Northern Ireland who argue that it is a much abused word. Some say that alienation does not exist. Indeed, the Prime Minister, at her famous press conference following the last Anglo-Irish summit, declared that
"somehow this word alienation has crept into the vocabulary."
She added:
"I don't think it's a good one."

Yet for many who perceive the moving Irish scene, a sense of alienation does run deep among the 38 per cent. minority population. There is alienation of one culture from another, one ethos from another. There is alienation through discrimination which has nothing to do with colour but a great deal to do with creed. There is alienation through unemployment and a deteriorating social and economic condition caused by, among other things, Thatcherite policies throughout Great Britain.

The Opposition would welcome any step—however small, however hesitant—that will seek to remove that

sense of alienation and bring the minority and the majority communities in Northern Ireland together. That is why we endorse the positive recommendations, as opposed to the negative ones, in the Baker report.

There are those who take the view—and the National Council for Civil Liberties is one such organisation—that the emergency powers exacerbate the alienation of a significant minority of the population and thus acts as an obstacle to political progress. Political progress, of course, would make dispensable both this report and the emergency provisions themselves. Political progress would lift a great weight from those who live in Northern Ireland.

But it was Lloyd George who said many years ago, in 1938:

"I believe that peace must first be found in the minds and the hearts of men."

Sir George has anxiously touched upon that aspect of the fundamental conflicts that are extant in Northern Ireland.

Essentially, the emergency provisions Act encompasses a complex tale of human rights, civil liberties and safety in Northern Ireland, and seeks to strike a balance between emergency powers to combat sustained terrorism and the rights of the individual. The question that Sir George has asked himself is whether the provisions of the Act strike the right balance between the need on the one hand to maintain as fully as possible the liberties of the individual, and on the other to provide the security forces and the courts with adequate powers to protect the public from current and foreseeable crime. As other hon. Members have said, I also regret that Sir George has passed away since the report was published. He was known for the quip that everything in life is foreseeable, as long as one has the foresight. That is certainly true of events in Northern Ireland.

One thing that is foreseeable is continued terrorist violence. The Secretary of State was right to tell the House that, while there may be a limitation of the violence that we know, its recrudescence is not, and can never be anticipated as being, far round the corner.

I should not seek to anticipate the following debate. But if violence does remain with us, we must ask ourselves whether the right balance is being struck between attempts to curb violence and bring the guilty to justice and the civil rights and liberties of all those who live in Northern Ireland. We therefore reach a confluence between those who have a heightened perception, and rightly so, of the need to develop civil rights and the urgent need and desire of the security forces to limit terrorist crime and violence. In this sharpened controversy, one thing stands out as a rock in the argument. It is that over the years—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) set a figure of 2,500—the most valuable civil right of all in Northern Ireland, the right to live, has been taken away.

As Sir George Baker said, if that right is denied, no other right is of any use. The right is recognised and protected by article 2(1) of the European convention. He further said of it:

"Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law."

In his report he extends that to

"a right to life and to live free from the fear of terrorist violence, coercion and threats, and from injury loss or damage by their criminal activities."

Many centuries ago the famous poet John Donne put it better than any barrister or hon. Member could, when he said:

"Any man's *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankind*".

All hon. Members see with great sadness the death, injury or maiming of anyone by violence in Northern Ireland. Therefore, we shall all have a deep and lasting interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland, until the violence ceases and the problems are resolved.

The House will not be surprised to learn that the most emotive issue, possibly because it is the most obnoxious, relates to the evidence of an accomplice who is a supergrass, or a copper's nark as he was known in former times. There is nothing new about the concept of immunity from prosecution on the turning of Queen's evidence. It sent Oscar Wilde to prison for two years in 1898.

There is something obnoxious about a supergrass who is sometimes paid £10 a week and sometimes £70 a week to provide evidence against fellow citizens, who cannot get right the dates of birth of his children in court, who, if press reports are to be believed, gambled heavily at the state expense, and who, when finding himself in a court of law as a witness, saw his evidence cast aside by a Lord Chief Justice as "unworthy of belief".

Sir George Baker pointed out that in the two years to December 1983 information provided by criminals who had elected to give evidence had led to about 1,000 charges in respect of serious offences, of which about 20 per cent. were murder. He also pointed out why people are concerned about the supergrass strategy. Many hon. Members have made observations about it tonight.

Sir George Baker's comments are as pertinent as those of anyone. He said that there was something morally or socially wrong about an informer, that an informer can and probably does abuse the system, that there is no corroboration, that the innocent might be convicted, that there is a danger that to obtain immunity the supergrass will say what the police want to hear, that it might be a propaganda weapon for terrorists, and that it lowers the law in the community's esteem.

Baker appended his own refutation of the various criticsms. He pointed out that there had always been a possibility of abuse. He deemed it advisable to get corroboration if possible. In the case of those who are innocent and who may be proven guilty, he pointed out that not a single concrete case had been presented to him, which shows how difficult it is to prove a double negative. In the case of the propaganda weapon for terrorists, he points out that it is only natural for them to try to persuade as many people as possible that it is unfair, thus neutralising the grave danger in which they find themselves.

None of those appended comments refutes the criticism that has been cited. It is especially significant that there is no appended comment against the two major arguments against the use of supergrasses—the danger that the accomplices will say what the police want to hear, and that the practice lowers the public's esteem for the law.

If there are to be draconian powers and practices, and if they are to be maintained in force, it is essential that the authoities present clearly stated arguments and evidence that these powers are necessary.

I have participated in my first major debate on a major subject. The House has listened with rapt attention to the various points made during the debate. We are discussing

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

the powers in Northern Ireland through which the security forces operate. They touch on justice, civil rights and human liberties, which are the bases of our society.

At a press conference in November the Prime Minister took the proposals of the All Ireland Forum and, on three separate occasions, said "Out", "Out", "Out". The Opposition believe that it is time that the supergrasses were out. It will soon be time for the Diplock courts to be out, and the concept of arrest without reason should also be out. It will be the greatest epitaph to Sir George that if the positive recommendations in his report are accepted by the Government they will pave the way towards some reconciliation in Northern Ireland and provide a step forward, however hesitant or small. That is why I commend the Opposition amendment to the House.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): We have had many interesting and constructive speeches in the debate, some more vigorous than others. Some hon. Members strayed widely into general security policy, while others concentrated on aspects of Sir George Baker's report and made suggestions for amending the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, which we shall be renewing after this debate.

I emphasise the Government's concern to protect life and civil liberties in Northern Ireland to the fullest possible extent. As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) said, the first and central right is the right to life, which must be protected as the first priority. The Emergency Provisions Act remains an essential element in the drive to eradicate terrorism — I emphasise the word "eradicate"—from life in Northern Ireland and to bring about a return to normality in the Province. Of course, it has been a focus of concern on human rights grounds, and I shall deal with that later.

I assure those right hon. and hon. Members who spoke in the debate that, although I may not manage to reply to each point now, I shall read carefully all the speeches and consider all the points when we come to frame our legislative proposals in due course.

Sir George Baker's review of the Act was the first thorough independent examination of its operation since 1975. I pay tribute to Sir George Baker for the way in which he undertook his task. His wit and wisdom, patience and courtesy, and his insight into the problems of the Province struck everyone who had dealings with him during his review. Sad though we are that he has died since he completed the report, it will be seen as a fitting climax to a life of great distinction.

During the debate, the Government have been engaged in a listening exercise to prepare ourselves for the legislation that we shall introduce in due course. Three fundamental questions must be answered at the outset. Do we need the powers? Have we been dilatory in introducing proposals in response to the Baker report? Was Sir George Baker circumscribed by his terms of reference?

I believe that we need the powers and that they will remain for the foreseeable future, although of course they will be amended. However, their essence will remain a major part of the battle against terrorism. We must accept that the position in Northern Ireland is different from that on this side of the water. That was summed up graphically in the comment of the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who said that he would not be a juryman in any circumstances in Northern Ireland. Sir George Baker drew attention to a relevant and important quotation from Lord Lowry's dictum at the end of the McGrady case, when he mentioned the pressures that were put on the courts by those who come before them. He said:

> "This war is being waged by organisations which style themselves armies and observe military procedures, but it has not invaded, and will not be allowed to invade, the courts. The rule of law has prevailed and will continue to prevail there. We will accept but one standard of proof in criminal cases, namely, proof beyond reasonable doubt."

That gives a flavour of the pressures under which the courts have been, and a flavour, too, of the determination of the courts and the judges in Northern Ireland to ensure that the courts are not corrupted and invaded by the activities of those who seek to subvert their position in society. We shall need these powers. We shall be looking carefully at amendments that may need to be made to them, but for the foreseeable future they will be an essential feature of life in the Province.

Having said that, the Government cannot legitimately be accused of being dilatory in their response to Sir George Baker's report. Bearing in mind how these matters touch on the delicate balance between the need to preserve security and ensure that guilty men are arrested, convicted and put behind bars, and the need to preserve the civil liberties of the vast majority of the people in the Province, it was right carefully to study Sir George Baker's report and to listen to the views of the House of Commons, as we have done today, and then, in due course, to prepare our legislative proposals. Every minute or week spent on making sure that we get those recommendations and the balance right will have been well spent.

Mr. Maginnis: Has the hon. Gentleman had consultations with other parties outside the House in the intervening period? Will he explain a little more clearly the reasons for the delay in considering the Baker report?

Mr. Scott: A number of other organisations have made their views on the operation of the emergency provisions clear to us, not least the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in Northern Ireland. They have all made representations in writing, or in other ways, and we shall bear them in mind, as well as listening to the views of the House.

Whatever his terms of reference, Sir George Baker was not circumscribed by them, and he was prepared to make a judgment as to whether emergency powers were important and essential in Northern Ireland. In paragraph 468, he said:

> "It will be a long, hard road. It is utterly unrealistic to believe, as some do, that the main powers given by the Act can be repealed tomorrow, or in the near future."

Whatever the terms of reference may have said about the continuing need for emergency powers, he reinforced that in the strongest language possible.

Some detailed points have been raised. I reassure the hon. Member for Middlesbrough and others who raised the question of the concept of reasonableness in terms of suspicion. This is the one part of the report about which the Government are convinced, and we shall be moving to meet that recommendation.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) raised a point that is tangential to the provisions of the Act, but to which I shall refer. I reiterate what my right hon. Friend said

when he opened the debate. There is not, and never has been, a policy of summary execution or shoot to kill in Northern Ireland. The law provides that any person may use only such force as is reasonable, and both the police and the Army in Northern Ireland have to operate within the law. They have specific instructions as to how they should behave. If they breach those instructions, their members are liable to prosecution through the courts like any other member of the community.

The hon. Member for Foyle raised a particular case about the deaths of Fleming and Doherty, and queried why a statement was not being made. This case is being investigated by the police, and a full report will then be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It cannot be right for a Minister to make a statement about such cases that could prejudice the outcome of investigations. At the moment, it is much better to allow the process of investigation, with papers going to the DPP for his decision, to be carried through.

Mr. Hume: Could not the statement that the hon. Gentleman has just made have been made some time ago?

Mr. Scott: I have seen this opportunity to make this statement. I should have thought that most people understood, in the circumstances of Northern Ireland, how one could easily prejudice these cases by Ministers or others leaping in to make statements. I have said it now, and it is on the record, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that.

Mr. Archer: Are the Government sympathetic to the three proposals of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights — making public the yellow card instructions and the reports of investigations after they have been investigated, and a general review of the law on the subject?

Mr. Scott: I should like to consider them with the suggestions that have been made during the debate. In due course, I shall make clear the Government's view on those matters. This is not the appropriate time for the Government to state a firm position, although in odd cases we have made up our minds.

The evidence of former accomplices has been a theme running through this debate. It is right that the House should take careful note of the worries expressed in the Northern Ireland community about some aspects of the so-called supergrass system. Obviously, we all share some of those concerns. As has been said in the debate, there is nothing new in the concept of accomplice evidence or its use in Northern Ireland, anywhere else in the United Kingdom or, indeed, in the Western world. It would be wrong for the police to turn away evidence that might bring violent criminals to justice. There are people walking the streets of Northern Ireland today who are alive or unmaimed because dangerous men have been put away through the evidence provided by informers.

The responsibility for assessing the worth of that evidence must rest upon the courts. It is not for Ministers to judge whether their evidence is worthy and should stand up, nor is it for Ministers to make moral judgments about the character of informers who come forward with that evidence. The recent acquittals of defendants accused on the evidence of Raymond Gilmour and the comments of the Lord Chief Justice underline the objectivity of safeguards provided by the Northern Ireland judicial system. It does not cast doubt on the principle of the use of accomplice evidence. In finding the defendants not guilty, the Lord Chief Justice said:

> "An accomplice or informer, or someone who is both, can tell the truth and can command acceptance as a witness of the truth, but he needs to be impressive to overcome the handicaps inevitably associated with his position."

The courts have to deal with that aspect. They must judge each case on its merits and come to a view on those who come forward to give the evidence. It certainly cannot be right for Ministers to step in and say that in no circumstances should such evidence be brought before the courts.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) raised the issue of certifying out more offences from the scheduled list. In principle, I endorse what Sir George Baker said about widening the Attorney-General's discretion to certify particular cases out of the scheduled mode of trial. We shall study carefully the list of offences that he suggested should be brought within the Attorney-General's discretion. For some of those offences — most notably robbery and aggravated burglary — it would be difficult for the Attorney-General to take a rationally based decision. Nevertheless, it will be possible to take a considerable stride in the direction put forward by Sir George Baker, and in due course we shall let the House know what we have in mind.

I do not believe that there is any evidence to suggest that the criteria for bail are interpreted by the courts in Northern Ireland less liberally than they are on this side of the water. Sir George Baker said that 42·52 per cent. of applications for bail under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act were granted between 1978 and 1982. I do not believe that there is any real evidence to suggest that judges in Northern Ireland are not continuing to use their good sense over bail and, therefore, there is no need to extend the Bail Act 1976 to the Province.

One of the other major worries expressed—I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State share that worry —concerned the delay between arrest and people being brought to trial. That would worry anyone. Hon. Members have made the point that justice delayed is justice denied, and there is a considerable element of truth in that. The Director of Public Prosecutions, the courts and the police continue to cope well, bearing in mind all the circumstances, in processing the large number of cases involving serious offences with which they must deal.

The average time between arrest and trial fluctuates according to a variety of factors, not least the rate of arrest. In the first six months of this year, the average waiting time from first remand for terrorist type offences was down to 42 weeks from 46 weeks in 1983, although the figure of 46 had showed an increase from the years immediately before.

We shall continue to monitor the position and to ensure the fullest co-operation between the police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the courts to make the process as rapid as possible. As the House has already been told, it has been agreed that an extra county court judge should be appointed. He has not yet been selected and is not in post, but we hope that that appointment will relieve some of the pressures on the court.

One of the major causes of delay is the fact that the defence is allowed to wait until counsel of its choice is available. It would be difficult to take that right away, but it adds to the delays which frequently occur between arrest

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Continuance)

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Continuance) (No. 2) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

We have just concluded a full debate on the issues raised by the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and Sir George Baker's review of its operation. As I have said before, the Government accept that there is a good case for amending the Act, but we have not yet reached final decisions on the shape of our legislative proposals. We shall now proceed to take those decisions in the light of the comments made by Members during the course of the earlier debate and in the light of representations made by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and other interested parties in Northern Ireland.

In the meantime, for the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have given, we consider it necessary to ask the House to authorise the continuation of the Act. In so doing, I am conscious that Sir George Baker, having considered all the evidence put to him in the course of his review, accepted that there was a continuing need for emergency powers in Northern Ireland. The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and other observers have reached the same conclusion. The Government believe that there is some scope for amending those powers, but we are convinced that the principal measures provided for in the Act will remain necessary until there is a more marked improvement in the security situation.

I remind the House briefly of what those powers are. The Act provides for trial by a judge sitting alone for persons accused of specific scheduled offences. It contains additional arrest and detention powers for the police and the Army, together with certain exceptional powers of search and seizure. The Act also provides for the proscription of certain criminal organisations. The Act does not, of course, alter the central principles of British justice as they apply in the Province. The onus remains on the prosecution to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Accused persons have the opportunity to take legal advice of their choice and to be represented by their own lawyers in open court and there remains the right of appeal against conviction or sentence on matters both of law and of fact.

There may be some scope for improving the provisions of the Act. The Government are now proceeding to forge their leagislative proposals. The views expressed in the earlier debate this evening will be helpful and will be taken fully into account alongside other views. Meanwhile, I have no hesitation in saying that in the interests of security, and indeed justice, in Northern Ireland it is essential that the powers in the 1978 Act should remain in force. I therefore commend the order to the House.

10.15 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): I try not to operate on the principle of the bellman—"If I say it three times it is true." I attempted earlier today to set out the Opposition's position on the administration and performance of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) supplemented that from the Front Bench, and some of my other hon. Friends also spoke in the debate. Nothing would be gained by repeating what has already been said.

Those who introduced the original Act envisaged it as temporary legislation to deal with an emergency. They therefore provided that the main provisions of the Act should be reviewed by the House every six months. That provision appears in section 33. My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said that it was a wise provision, and I respectfully agree with him. It was intended that the House should at six-monthly intervals apply its judgment to the question whether all or any of the provisions of the Act were necessary at the time and whether some of them might be doing more harm than good.

It was a Conservative Government who included that provision because, as the then Attorney-General said, the measure was draconian. The Opposition have tried faithfully to discharge their responsibility, twice a year, of applying their mind to these serious problems.

There may be a case for a single Select Committee or a monitoring body to keep both the Emergency Provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act under constant review and to report to the House on each Act at half-yearly or at least annual intervals. Today, I merely make that suggestion. I shall develop it on some other occasion.

Threats to the life and health of the people of Northern Ireland must be taken seriously. So must threats to their liberty. It is clear from the debate that has just taken place that there are a number of amendments that, like Sir George Baker, we should like to see made to the Act. In some respects, we go further. There are a number of provisions in the legislation of which we doubt the wisdom, and some that we positively believe to be counter-productive. They make no contribution to protecting people from violence. On the contrary, they make the task of the police and the security forces more difficult. If the Government take the Act away and give it serious consideration, together with Sir George Baker's report and what has been said this evening, and then return to the House with appropriate proposals, we will of course reconsider the situation. Tonight, unless we can be persuaded otherwise, we propose to vote against the continuance order.

10.17 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): First, I must say how much I regret the fact that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary did not take this opportunity to make a statement about strip searches. I have been promised an answer on that subject for a considerable time, and have suggested a proposal that might take some of the heat out of the situation. The matter is important to those who are in prison, but I do not intend to talk about it now. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) wishes to speak on the matter.

I shall have to prune the speech that I would have made had I been called earlier. If I do not take up all the points to which hon. Members not of my party but sitting on

neighbouring Benches thought that I might have responded, I am prompted not by a lack of desire to do so, but simply by considerations of time.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I forgive the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that he forgives me. From his own account, he has much of which to be forgiven. It being Christmas, I wish the hon. Gentleman a merry Christmas and a happy new year and hope that he will soon find himself within a united Ireland.

Like several other hon. Members, I was invited to give evidence to Sir George Baker. Regrettably, I had to decline. I am even more sorry about that now, having heard the tributes that have been paid to him and having heard what a charming man he was. The House should know why I declined. I did not think that I could give adequate evidence, based on the flimsy replies that I have received from the Northern Ireland Office, under both the Labour Government and the present Government. I have continuously asked how many people who have been convicted of scheduled offences have been convicted on the basis of their uncorroborated confessions. An answer to that question has repeatedly been denied to me for a variety of reasons. If Ministers are not prepared to let me know how the legislation is working, it is difficult for me to make any valid comments on its operation. Therefore, lacking such information, I decided not to accept Sir George Baker's invitation. The Secretary of State of the day was aware of my reasons because we were in correspondence.

The Under-Secretary of State opened the debate blandly, but he said that we are going back to no jury trials, the acceptance of uncorroborated evidence and confessions, a bending of the rules with regard to confessions and a bending of the rules with regard to evidence. People who are convicted under those circumstances are treated specially within the United Kingdom. I am not arguing that they should have special category status—I never have — but they are special and that should be recognised. Many of the political problems that have arisen in the House derive from our failure to accept that people who are convicted under this legislation are treated differently. Some political problems, such as the rise of the Provisional Sinn Fein could have been avoided if we had accepted that.

How are we to measure the success of the legislation in regard to its reducing violence and how are we to measure its effect on political opinion? The Secretary of State wisely said today that the number of violent incidents is falling, we welcome that, but he would not draw any conclusions from that because previous Secretaries of State have latched on to a series of figures and been proved sadly wrong.

We must examine the number of fatalities which are associated with the incidents. Such examination reveals that, although there has been a reduction in the number of incidents, there has been no corresponding reduction in the number of fatalities. The conclusion to be drawn from that is that, unfortunately, the terrorist is becoming more efficient. We must therefore examine associated problems and the political implications of violence. If the terrorist is able to maintain a given level of instability in the Six Counties, he is succeeding. If he is succeeding, that has repercussions on the effect of the Government's policy and our attitude to the legislation. If the object of the legislation is to reduce the number of fatalities and to restore normalcy, it is not succeeding.

We must also realise that problems have arisen as a result of the Ulsterisation policy introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). I understand why my right hon. Friend is not present, but I told him that I would be raising this matter. I do not want anyone to think that I am doing it behind his back.

The policy of Ulsterisation has been a failure in the Six Counties. It puts the onus on the Loyalist community to fight terrorism, with a reduced British Army commitment. Because Catholics comprise only about 2 per cent. of the membership of the UDR and the RUC, most security force casualties are Loyalists or Protestants. Therefore, many people over here say, "That is the Irish fighting among themselves. Leave them to it." They do not think about the individuals or the circumstances in which they are killed. In addition, because most security force casualties are Loyalists and not British soldiers, people over here think that those Loyalists are expendable if their deaths will keep the lid on the cauldron. That is the wrong attitude, but it is the result of the Ulsterisation policy.

The Ulsterisation policy also increases sectarianism. At one time, most of the people killed in Northern Ireland were Catholics or nationalists. Now the number of Protestant deaths is increasing. Many of those victims are not civilians, but members of the security force. However, when a funeral takes place in Northern Ireland people do not ask whether the dead man was a civilian or a member of the UDR or RUC. They say, "He was a Protestant."

Ulsterisation must be looked at again. It leads to sectarianism and to some of the problems that we are discussing. That must be understood.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): The hon. Gentleman seems to be implying that there is reduced Roman Catholic participation in the police service in Northern Ireland. Is he aware that there has been a considerable increase in the number of Roman Catholic members of the RUC over the past two years and that, therefore, his argument falls flat?

Mr. McNamara: The number may have been increasing within the RUC, but not within the UDR. Within the whole range of security forces, the figure is 2 to 3 per cent. Therefore, my argument stands.

Mr. Ken Maginnis Why are the Catholics not in the UDR?

Mr. McNamara: I do not wish to engage in verbal fisticuffs with the hon. Gentleman, because I have wished him a merry Christmas and a happy new year. but the answer to his question is that many members of the UDR were originally recruited from the B specials. That is why the Catholics would not join.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman's party set them up.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman does not have to tell me that. He need only read the speeches that I made at the time. I have spent most of my time on this Bench because of our attitude on this issue.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: I do not mind giving way at Christmas time, but the hon. Gentleman's intervention will keep other hon. Members out of the debate.

Mr. Ross: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that a considerable number of Roman Catholics joined the UDR on the west bank of the Foyle, in Londonderry? If so, I should tell him that, as far as I know, none now joins from that area due to the pressure put on people by their co-religionists, the IRA and similar terrorist organisations in that area.

Mr. McNamara: One would need to quantify "a considerable number". However, I do not want to enter into that argument, because it does not help. I thought that my case was helping the hon. Gentleman's position. I was trying to show some sympathy towards it. The hon. Member for Londonderry East (Mr. Ross) did not seem to realise that that was what my speech was about.

One interesting statistic is that 50,000 people in Northern Ireland have been arrested or detained under the emergency provisions or prevention of terrorism legislation without being charged. The overwhelming majority of them come from the Catholic or nationalist community. If that happened in the United Kingdom as a whole, it would mean 900,000 people, and if it happened in the United States it would mean 6·8 million people. Furthermore, if one assumes that each of those people has two relatives who are appalled at their arrest and detention, and at their questioning for information-gathering purposes, and so decide to vote for the Provisional Sinn Fein, we get the total vote that the Provisional Sinn Fein obtained last time. One man detained without trial or charge, and two friends or relatives, and that is the figure that one gets.

Incidentally, it is not that the SDLP vote has fallen, but rather that the Provisional Sinn Fein has benefited from the previous abstentionist vote. The way in which the Act and order have been kept going, and the way in which they fail to take on board the important political implications, has given credibility to the Provisional Sinn Fein. Perhaps the Government are willing to pay that price, but equally a political price has to be paid for such legislation. I think that we saw that in the election in Belfast, West. I think —but I hope that it will not be so—that that may be reflected in next year's local government elections.

The Government must bear a heavy responsibility when it comes to their attitude on these issues. Much of the threat in the Six Counties comes from that failure to realise that people convicted under this legislation are different from other convicted criminals in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. That is what led to the hunger strikes, and to the rise of Provisional Sinn Fein. Much of the blame can be laid at the door of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act. The Government, and those who are prepared to maintain it, have much to answer for.

10.33 pm

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): Of course, my right hon. and hon. Friends will support renewal of this legislation. But on their behalf I should point out that we are extremely disappointed that the Government have not used the power of proscription contained in the Act to re-proscribe Sinn Fein. I make no apology for saying that, because I have been saying it over the years.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) warned us of the dangers of the Ulsterisation policy, without putting forward an alternative. I assure him that when there were 15,000 or 17,000 young regular soldiers from the mainland in Northern Ireland, many of them aged 18 to 21, they often inadvertently caused far more alienation and far more problems in the community. That was due to their lack of experience and knowledge. The people of Northern Ireland have never shied away from spilling their blood if necessary in defence of their position within the United Kingdom. If they have to do so now—and while it is regrettable and no one would wish it to happen—they will continue to do so. In spite of the number of members of the security forces who have been murdered, thank God there has been no shortage of people ready to step in to take their place.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): How would the proscription of the Provisional Sinn Fein undermine and destroy terrorism? Would not that give the terrorists a martyr status and influence matters in the United States and elsewhere? That may be precisely what they want.

Mr. McCusker: I shall come back to that issue, but I wish to refer to several other matters first. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) talked earlier about the supergrass system and seemed to suggest that the potential abuses within the system were special to Northern Ireland.

I shall read to him an article from a London newspaper on 16 September last year, which was headed:

"Supergrass 'shops' black gangster".

It stated:

"A leading member of a gang of West Indian and armed robbers was jailed for 15 years at the Old Bailey yesterday after being 'shopped' by the country's first black supergrass.

He was arrested on the information of fellow gang-member Errol Walker, 27, who gave evidence against him.

Walker turned supergrass in April last year, and is currently serving a lenient five-year sentence for 36 robberies. He named all his criminal associates, after telling detectives 'I want to clear the slate and start a new life'.

Mr. Godfrey Carey, prosecuting, said Walker gave Scotland Yard a mass of information which enabled detectives to smash the gang. Various members carried out raids all over West London, using shotguns, machettes, knives and coshes. Their haul totalled £150,000."

Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a black supergrass is any more likely to be honest and that his word should be accepted — gangster though he is — than a white supergrass in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Frankly, the man's colour does not bother me, although it sounds as if the hon. Gentleman is bothered about his colour — [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I shall answer the question if the public school hooligans will be quiet.

Earlier I referred to the fact that a perjured murderer was responsible for the appearance of 35 people in court. The judge knew that the man was a liar, a killer and rogue. All his actions suggested that he had no integrity whatever, and the judge stripped him clean as a liar. Does the hon. Gentleman really think that the judge had any choice, except to give way? Instead of allowing separate trials, the judge was forced to set all those people free because the supergrass system was an utter failure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. I appeal to the House. This is a short debate and I am anxious to call those hon. Members who were not called in the previous debate, but if there are long interventions, hon. Members will be disappointed.

Mr. McCusker: I am just as revolted as the hon. Gentleman by what he has related. In fact, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland vindicated the system by exposing that individual. All I am saying is that the system of supergrasses is not confined to Northern Ireland, and that the evidence of criminals is accepted elsewhere.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Everyone knows that.

Mr. McCusker: One would not have known it in view of what was said earlier. Mr. Gilmour only became all the things we have heard described once he decided to turn Queen's evidence. Prior to that, he was a close friend of these people — a confidant. He joined them in their murdering activities. He only became what the hon. Gentleman said when he decided to tell the truth——

Mr. Flannery: In his middle teens.

Mr. McCusker: It has been suggested that the Government are pursuing a shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland. That policy is being pursued not by the Government but by Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinnis and their associates. They pursue that policy with a great deal of efficiency.

Mr. Flannery: The Shankill butchers.

Mr. McCusker: Is it any wonder that when the security forces are confronted with people committed to a shoot-to-kill policy they do not stand in front of a car, hold up their hands and ask them to stop—they would probably be run down and gunned down. If the security forces have to make split second decisions to defend themselves that result in the deaths of armed terrorists engaged in murdering an innocent person, it ill behoves anyone in this House to complain.

The other comment about the trial was that people had lost their civil liberties because they had been in prison for too long. I agree that that is terrible—but prison doors open; graves do not open. Cemetery doors in Northern Ireland open only to allow in the innocent victims of murder. To some degree the people who walk out of the Crumlin road have an advantage that hundreds of policemen and police reservists, those who serve in the army and innocent women and children — including those who died in Brighton — do not have. While I regret that loss of freedom, prison gates open and those people will eventually gain their freedom and enjoy life again.

Mr. Winnick: The Opposition are opposed to the terrorists. We loathe terrorism.

Mr. McCusker: If the hon. Gentleman had been here earlier today, he would have heard hon. Member after hon. Member say that.

I want to address myself briefly to what the hon. Gentleman mentioned earlier—the proscription of Sinn Fein. I realise that my hand would have been a great deal stronger if I had been able to cite Sir George Baker in support of the proscription of Sinn Fein. He dealt at length with its relationship with the IRA and how the twin-headed approach of that evil organisation was able to exploit opportunities either by direct terrorist violence or through the political opportunities offered, for example, by the Labour party conferences or by being invited to the House.

Although Baker faced that and put on record a number of important pieces of information about that relationship, he neatly side stepped making a decision. In paragraph 423 he said—and it has already been described as a most remarkable statement:

"this question is now squarely one for political decision . . . and because other measures are also being considered by both British and Irish Governments I do not think I am qualified to . . . make any recommendation on the submissions to proscribe Sinn Fein.

We could not fail to notice the importance that the report attached to the relationship and Baker's fascination with its despicable publication *The Republican News*, which described in detail for him and the rest of us the murder of Robert Bradford, Member of Parliament, the so-called execution of Edgar Graham, a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the killing of what it described as the legitimate target of Charles Armstrong, the chairman of Armagh district council.

In paragraph 39, Baker described his initial reaction to the publication as

"surprised annoyance. Why was anyone allowed to publish such a statement of intent? Why was the publication not banned and the author prosecuted? Gradually I came to realise that for me An Phoblacht . . . should be compulsory reading. It has given me insight into the thinking and intentions . . . of some Republicans and of the inextricable links between Sinn Fein and the PIRA."

There is no doubt that for him and us *The Republican News* has served a useful purpose. However, it exists not for the benefit of us, judges or academics, but to serve the cause of republican terrorism—to popularise its campaign, to justify its foul murders, to indoctrinate its followers and to give an air of respectability to those who some hon. Members think are politicians. It blackens and besmirches all who challenge it, including the Government, unionists, the Roman Catholic church, the SDLP, and the Government of the Irish Republic. Sir George Baker's initial reaction to *The Republican News* was right: it should be banned and its authors should be prosecuted.

Having established the inextricable links between Sinn Fein and the PIRA, further research led Sir George Baker to make the following observation in paragraph 46:

"There cannot be any reason or indeed possible doubt that Sinn Fein is not only a political wing but also a complete accomplice and partner of the PIRA."

The IRA is not seen as a wing of Sinn Fein, but Sinn Fein as a wing of the IRA. As the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) pointed out, it is clear within the Republican movement that the IRA is the predominant force and that Sinn Fein is its poodle. It is clear that Sinn Fein is under the control and domination of the IRA, which is why it must annually proclaim its support for the armed struggle.

How does that square with the reason given at the time of de-proscription by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? On 4 April 1974 he stated:

"In my view there are signs that on both extreme wings there are people who, although at one time committed to violence, would now like to find a way back to political activity. It is right to encourage this as much as possible."—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1974; Vol. 871, c. 1476.]

He did not say that the people who had committed violence were moving towards peaceful means to pursue their political objectives, but it is reasonable to assume that he intended that. He could not have intended to de-proscribe and, therefore, to legalise Sinn Fein to enable it to continue supporting violence and to use its political muscle to reinforce what it calls the armed struggle.

There is nothing original or unusual about me or the Government being concerned about that relationship. We must believe Sinn Fein. Morrison has told us how Sinn

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Fein intends to promote its objective. It has said clearly that it does not believe that terrorism or the ballot box can achieve its form of a united Ireland. It believes that by the use of both terrorism and politics it will gain power in Ireland. We must believe that. If we are to deal with that strategy, we cannot turn from the threat which Sinn Fein poses to the democratic process.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has changed his view slightly since 1974. He no longer justifies his action on the basis that he was encouraging movement away from violence. That is clear from his answer on 29 November, which is published in the *Official Report*, column 1075. He now seems to believe that any organisation with a political view should be allowed to pursue it, so long as it does not act in a blatantly paramilitary manner. That was not his view in 1974, but it seems to have been his view in 1984. I am sorry that he is not here, because I should have wished to hear him expound on this. If that is his view now, it contradicts the action that he took after 1974. He proscribed the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1975, which had, and, as far as I know, still has, a political viewpoint. Does the right hon. Gentleman now believe that no organisation, no matter what it supports, should be proscribed, and that action should be taken only against the members of those organisations who engage in criminal activity?

Sir George Baker expressed clearly the view of the majority in Northern Ireland when he said:

"Proscription is an expression of the outrage of the ordinary citizen, who comprise the overwhelming majority, at the barbarous acts of these organisations, and at the revolting glee with which they claim responsibility",

for their acts. That sums up the case for proscription. It is necessary because it will assist in the battle against terrorism generally. Sinn Fein should not be allowed to masquerade as almost a legitimate political party like the others. What offends most people in Northern Ireland is that it is not a political party. The difference is that, if it disagrees with someone, it murders him. It murders people committed to the democratic process who have been returned through the ballot box to public life not only in Northern Ireland but in Great Britain.

Sinn Fein should not be allowed access to Government and statutory bodies. It should not be allowed access to the media. It should be prevented from using modern technology to churn out obnoxious claims of victories when it murders innocent men, women and children. The logic of the Secretary of State's and his Minister's position is that that organisation should be outlawed. Why should the Secretary of State and his Ministers refuse to see the representatives of that body if they consider it to be an ordinary political party? They clearly do not. Yet they continue to allow Sinn Fein to pursue its stated objective of exploiting the ballot box to its own end.

Sir George Baker, having side stepped the issue of proscription, tried to help the Government by putting forward other ways of dealing with Sinn Fein or similar organisations. He suggested that no political grouping should be allowed to contest elections unless it stated clearly that it was opposed to the use of violence. If the Government will not consider proscription, will they at least consider that?

Sir George Baker also said—this should be borne in mind by the supporters of Sinn Fein in the House—that,

"The utterances of Mr. Adams leave no doubt in my mind that the links are strong enough to prove that a killer is an agent of Sinn Fein also."

On that basis, he tried to encourage the victims of terrorism to take civil action against Sinn Fein and try to get damages, in the belief that if we can attack its bankroll, we might undermine its capabilities. I have resources to pay for anyone who might wish to take civil action against Sinn Fein. I appealed publicly to anyone in Northern Ireland who believed himself to have suffered—there are tens of thousands—at the hands of Sinn Fein, to come forward so that we could test what Sir George Baker said. My legal adviser told me that no one would come forward. He was right. They know that if they come forward, they are more likely to get a bullet or a bomb long before their cases came to court. Therefore, we have not been able to test whether civil action can be taken against Sinn Fein.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South suggested another idea, which came to him while he was speaking and which he did not have time to think through. It related to whether the Government could get their hands on the finances of the Provisional Sinn Fein.

If a determined Government can get their hands on NUM finances, why cannot they apply the same ingenuity to getting hold of Provisional Sinn Fein resources? I do not think that they can get their hands on Sinn Fein resources while it is a legitimate political party. However, it cannot be beyond the wit of man to do something—to stop them in their tracks. What we can not do is turn a blind eye to what that organisation has told us. It says, "We shall achieve our political objectives by exploiting democracy when we can, and when we can't we'll use the bomb and the bullet." If that is the challenge, it is time that the Government picked up the gauntlet.

10.55 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): This evening we have seen a clear demonstration of a split Labour party on the subject of Northern Ireland. We have heard almost universal condemnation of violence and appropriate expressions of grief and sensitivity. Completely divorced from that was the diatribe from almost every Labour Member on the restrictions upon individual liberty and criminal law and procedure which all Governments have believed to be necessary. It is almost impossible for a neutral observer to conclude that hon. Members are talking about the same parts of the country, or that the two problems go together.

Labour Members have the effrontery to say that there should be no temporary emergency provisions. They can say that and keep straight faces, only because they have split minds.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) gave us an interesting and learned dissertation upon the academic problems of changing the criminal procedure law in Northern Ireland, the implications for civil liberty and other matters which, in an academic world, receive attention. But we are talking about murder, about life and death, about violence and the intimidation of witnesses and jurors. They are rife. They are daily events. The whole population goes in fear. People cannot carry on their normal lives because a great threat hangs over them.

People who speak up for Northern Ireland, such as our gallant friends in the Unionist parties, have to endure that all the time. Yet the Opposition have the effrontery to go

on and on about comparatively small temporary changes in the law. Do they ever say that because of these problems this legislation is necessary; that all they ask is that it is as pain free as possible and that they will remove the restrictions as soon as it is possible for people to move without fear? Of course, they do not, because they are playing the party game.

I know the hon. Member for Middlesbrough to be decent and honest. He and many of his hon. Friends apply their minds to the problems honestly and in the interests of the House, but there is a distinct hint of hyprocrisy about the Labour party's approach to the problem. *[Interruption.]*

The Opposition spokesman may attack us, but one must say such things, because the party game applied to such subjects is repulsive to ordinary decent people. I do not believe in that game, but it has been played by the Opposition spokesman who refused to say that we should not have temporary emergency provisions to deal with a special and exceptional situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have not spoken in this debate, and therefore I do not understand any of the points made by the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is not on a point of order. I believe that he will seek to catch my eye later.

Mr. Stanbrook: I am surprised that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough even thought that he was raising a point of order. From time to time, it needs to be said that one cannot in the same speech say that there is great violence in Northern Ireland which affects our courts, and at the same time say that there is no case for temporary emergency provisions to deal with the abuses of our system.

Certain matters should be considered. In an ideal world, one need not have any restrictions.

Mr. Bell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Give way.

Mr. Stanbrook: I shall get this off my chest first. We all know that, in practice, in the mind of a court the line drawn between guilt and innocence does not depend so much on something abstract. It does not really depend upon proof beyond all reasonable doubt, as the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) said.

Mr. Archer: I did not say that.

Mr. Stanbrook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman may not have said that, but it is often said. Many other considerations are involved, including the rules of evidence and the sufficiency of evidence. The decision at the end of the day is often made by a jury, considering all the facts and applying its own common sense to the question.

It is true that one of the casualties of the Northern Ireland system of justice is the absence of jury trials. That means that all those who come before Diplock courts, which means anyone accused of committing a scheduled offence—whether a member of the IRA, a policeman or a soldier — is deprived of that benefit. Recently, a British soldier, aged 19, was convicted of murder. He was convicted by a single judge in circumstances which, had they been put before a jury at the Old Bailey at the Central Criminal Court, would certainly have resulted in an acquittal on the murder charge. The circumstances may well have been said to have involved the agony of the moment — such as occurred in the Waldorf action. It could have been said that an officer, in the agony of the moment, under great provocation, might well have acted in a particular way. That is why there is a big difference ——

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that that case is a matter of appeal at present.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not think that this case is before the courts at present. I think I am accurate in saying that.

Mr. Stanbrook: In any event, I have got if off my chest. I have said what I wanted to say.

The fact is that the Labour party has not approached this whole subject properly, in a way that honesty dictates that the Labour party should approach it. Labour Members are fixed with the idea that there should be a close examination of civil liberties; yet they ignore those constraints upon their liberties that are necessarily imposed upon any responsible Government placed in such a position.

What is the proper response? It is for the Government to put the whole problem before an independent expert, a former judge of the United Kingdom, and ask: in what respect do we not need these provisions to secure justice in the context of Northern Ireland? The Government have done that, and that judge has reported. The judge has made certain recommendations which should be adopted. The fact remains that there is a strong case, and the Opposition know it, for the preservation of temporary emergency provisions such as those we are debating.

11.4 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I apologise to the Under-Secretary. I was speaking to one of his hon. Friends when he introduced the order and as a result I missed his opening remarks. The debate has, as usual, ranged fairly widely, but I am curious about the effect of article 2 of the order which says that it

"means all the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, except sections 5 and 28 to 36"

and so on. I hope that the Under-Secretary will explain the effect of that when he replies.

I listened to much of the earlier debate and all of this debate with the exception of the few minutes that I missed at the start. I was struck, as I have been on many previous occasions, by the apparent willingness of so many hon. Members to believe everything that they are told about Northern Ireland. That is something that has a long but not altogether happy history in the House.

There was the shooting at Gransha hospital recently. There have been a number of terrorist attacks there over the years. Soldiers and people visiting relatives have also been killed at the general hospital which is only a mile or so away. It seems to have escaped attention that two guns were found in the possession of the IRA at Gransha hospital. One of them had been taken from a police constable some years ago. It is alleged that it has been used since to murder several people.

In the previous Parliament for some weeks hon. Members were complaining about a young man called Sean Gallaher from the Strabane area. It was alleged that

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he was innocent of everything he had ever been accused of. I listened to those exchanges and wondered why the Government never told the House that man's record. It would have cleared up all the arguments immediately. I eventually made some inquiries, but the matter was then dropped, and I never raised it. The House might be interested in it now. It shows that some people are willing to accept everthing that they are told.

The youth was arrested on the Ballycolman estate one day before his 16th birthday.

Mr. John David Taylor: Strabane.

Mr. Ross: It was Strabane. My right hon. Friend's geography is accurate. When the youth was arrested he was in possession of a ·303 rifle, which is not what one normally finds a 15-year-old running around with.

Miss Joan Maynard (Sheffield, Brightside): Not in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ross: Even in Northern Ireland it is unusual to find 15-year-olds running around with ·303 rifles.

Mr. Flannery: It is not. They are obvious, are they not?

Mr. Ross: They are, and the fact that the youth was arrested with one should lead one to believe that he did not have it for any good or legal purpose. He was put into St. Patrick's training school, from which he immediately absconded. He was then spotted living around the IRA caravan which was parked in Lifford just across the river. We can stand and look at it.

We then had the famous case of a Mr. McSheffrey, an internee who was released by the noble Lord Whitelaw, no doubt on the application of his tearful wife. Mr. McSheffrey was subsequently arrested holding up a bank for the IRA. Some months after that his house went up in smoke. When the rescue forces turned up, the front wall was in the front yard, the back wall was in the back yard and Mrs. McSheffrey and her children were under the floorboards which had fallen on top of them when the bomb which was being put together in the bedroom exploded.

The security forces in Northern Ireland are not as foolish and as willing to believe all that they are told as some politicians. Many of us who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland are concerned when we listen time after time in the Chamber to accounts that cannot be correct and find that Ministers, who are in possession of all the facts, are not prepared to relate them to the House and the country so that everyone is made aware of the truth. If they had made the facts known, many of the problems that we have encountered could have been avoided.

Many interesting and wise comments were made in the previous debate and the Baker report is a wise and reasonable document. I am gratified that there is a possibility of descheduling certain offences. As Northern Ireland Members carry out their constituency work, they come across cases—this is the experience of us all—where the scheduled procedure was not the appropriate line of action. Of course, there are dangers in all statutory sentences. When we direct ourselves to the consideration of new legislation, I hope that that factor will be well and truely taken care of and remedied.

In the previous debate there were complaints about aggrevation and harassment by members of the security forces. I have no doubt that we shall hear them again if certain Members catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Much of the alleged harassment and aggravation stems from occasions when they are seeking information and the individuals concerned are not prepared to give it. If we had a proper identity card system, all the information required would be available there and then. If someone was not prepared to carry his identity card and a small fine was applied regularly, he would no doubt learn quickly the error of his ways.

When the Government are considering the replacement of this valuable legislation, I hope that they will consider making the possession of a weapon which has been used for murder an offence in itself. This issue has been raised with the Government on many occasions, but, unfortunately, they have failed to act so far. We have only to think of the gun that was recovered at the Gransha hospital a couple of weeks ago to realise that weapons travel. A person who is found with a weapon that was used to commit murder must be presumed to have received it from another person. He did not find the weapon in his garden overnight; someone must have given it to him. If the person who received it knew that possession would of itself carry a heavy prison sentence, he might think twice before accepting responsibility for having it in his possession, let alone committing murder with it.

In the course of our work as constituency Members we have all talked to the police. We know as well as Ministers that weapons have been used for murder in different parts of Northern Ireland and have been transported throughout the Province. They have turned up again and again for the commission of murder. It seems that the IRA has a considerable number of weapons and tends to use only relatively few of them. As the weapons fall into the hands of the security forces, they are replaced. The IRA does not have a large number of weapons in use in all areas.

As a shooting man, I know how difficult it is to keep weapons in good condition. If a weapon becomes damp in the course of a day's shooting, it is necessary thereafter to clean and oil it and generally to take good care of it. Weapons that are used by terrorists have been found in many strange places and we can sssume that they have not received the good care that I have described. If terrorists have weapons that they wish to keep in good condition, they must keep them dry and oiled. The weapons that are in constant use do not receive that care. Therefore, the IRA tends to keep the bulk of its weapons safe and it is prepared at any time to sacrifice the few that are in constant use. For those reasons, the Government should look seriously at creating an offence of possession of a murder weapon.

The other matter that has not been covered, and should be covered, is the right of silence. It has concerned all of us in Northern Ireland for many years. Individuals are brought in, questioned and held, but steadfastly refuse to open their mouths. Those who are the godfathers—they were described as such by the late Airey Neave—are well known to the police. That has been happening in one form or another for many years. The godfathers are restricted to a fairly small number of people. They are the kingpins. Those who sit quietly, not doing anything themselves but directing, organising, recruiting and spreading their evil by every means at their disposal, should be an absolute top priority target for imprisonment. The silence behind which they hide is something that they

should not be allowed to go on using in future, as they have in the past. I hope that when we discuss the replacement legislation, we shall find something that will enable us to get at that relatively small group of key people in the IRA, and for that matter, in the Sinn Fein. They tend to turn up in both organisations with unfailing regularity.

I should like to give a relevant quotation from the Baker report. In paragraph 32, the good man who produced the report says:

> "I hope I have understood and have given full weight to all such arguments in my detailed consideration of the powers but there are three points to be made clear now:
>
> (1) There are others who attack the EPA, the security forces and the legal process including the judges and the courts, not for the ultimate purpose of preserving human rights and liberties but for sinister reasons."

That is why I opened my remarks with a review of a small number of the many cases that I have been aware of in the past. The attack of many people is not honest. When one sees the forces of law and order that keep society together in Ulster coming under attack, one immediately asks, at any rate in Northern Ireland, not what the published purpose is, but the real purpose, which is the one that the people making the allegations are unwilling to make public.

Baker continued:

> "(2) I have felt increasingly the need for a society for the furtherance of human *duties* to counter-balance those who are, rightly, so valiant for human rights."

A long time ago, someone said that the pulpit was the last refuge of the scoundrel — [HON. MEMBERS: "Patriotism."] He did not mean genuine patriotism, so I left that bit out. For the information of hon. Members, it had not escaped my attention that the word "patriotism" was used.

The plain truth is that there are many people who hide behind the banner of human rights, and are interested only in taking away human rights, above all, the right that we all want—the right to life. I can see the odd head or two shaking, but perhaps those who shake their heads should question those with whom they march behind the banner of human rights. The House is the final guarantor of human rights in this nation. That is why we who are of the Unionist tradition want to sit in it. This is where our human rights are guaranteed. That is why we come here. That is why the person who does not come here does not do so. He is not interested in human rights. He is interested in his selfish rights, and in the selfish desires of those whom he represents.

Thirdly, Sir George Baker said:

> "Nevertheless, I am completely unconvinced that if the EPA powers were, or were even substantially, abolished we would waken up next morning to universal sweet reason and an end to violence. Unfortunately they remain broadly necessary both to curb violence and to bring the guilty criminals to justice. The high probability of detection and subsequent conviction has always been regarded as the best deterrent."

That puts in a nutshell the vital reasons for maintaining this legislation. I believe that the legislation has been necessary, is necessary and, unfortunately, will continue to be necessary.

If anyone doubts the willingness of the IRA to murder those whom it would claim as its religious bedfellows, let him consider the punishment shootings, the murders of other Roman Catholics and the whole edifice of terrorism that the IRA has erected wherever it has become dominant, inflicting the most awful indignities on the population so as to drive them to their deaths or into the evil ways of which the activities of the IRA and Sinn Fein are the most blatant examples that this country has ever seen.

11.21 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I am delighted to be able to participate in this debate and to say that my colleagues and I will support the continuation of the legislation.

I remind hon. Members that, while we sit in the comfort of this House, members of the security forces are actively engaged in the defence of freedom and democracy in Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to their courage. Our minds should go to those who, in all kinds of weather, stand between us and the enemy. I am delighted that the voice of the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) is not heard in the Chamber, but I am sorrowful indeed that other hon. Members speak with that kind of voice and parrot many of the phrases of Republican propaganda, which should be condemned by every right-thinking Member of Parliament.

The House should be mindful of the families recently attacked by the IRA with murderous intent. Two members of the UDR are at this very moment fighting for their lives. That will not concern the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), because it is the result of his friends' activities. The whole House should condemn the action of the hon. Member for Islington, North. I hope that instead of running after petty Irish votes in his constituency he will in future think of the safety of the security forces and of every British citizen.

At this season of Christmas we should be thinking of the seven injured members of the UDR and especially the two who are so seriously ill. We should also remember the gallant member of the Army who recently lost his life on the Fermanagh border. It ill becomes any Member of the House to give succour or encouragement to murderous, butchering groups such as Sinn Fein and the fellow travellers of the IRA.

The legislation before us is important. The innocent Northern Ireland community continues to be subject to diabolical criminal attacks from republican men of blood —from terrorists whose only aim is the destruction of democracy and the denial of that right basic to any free society: the right to live. I trust that, after a resounding vote in the House tonight, there will be a continuance of the Act. I trust that Opposition Members will rise to the situation and defend freedom and democratic rights in Northern Ireland by ensuring that this legislation is retained.

I agree that the legislation should have been taken off the statute book long ago. But that can be done only when the situation permits it—when the men of murder and destruction have been defeated.

I was delighted to hear the Minister say that it was for the Government to eradicate the men of terror and the violent men in Northern Ireland. There can only be a future for democracy when the men of terror are removed from society.

When the choice was made in Londonderry between members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the SAS and members of the IRA, I am delighted to report that it was two IRA men who were carried out instead of two members of Her Majesty's forces. I make no apology to any hon. Member for clearly stating that view.

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he was innocent of everything he had ever been accused of. I listened to those exchanges and wondered why the Government never told the House that man's record. It would have cleared up all the arguments immediately. I eventually made some inquiries, but the matter was then dropped, and I never raised it. The House might be interested in it now. It shows that some people are willing to accept everthing that they are told.

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We then had the famous case of a Mr. McSheffrey, an internee who was released by the noble Lord Whitelaw, no doubt on the application of his tearful wife. Mr. McSheffrey was subsequently arrested holding up a bank for the IRA. Some months after that his house went up in smoke. When the rescue forces turned up, the front wall was in the front yard, the back wall was in the back yard and Mrs. McSheffrey and her children were under the floorboards which had fallen on top of them when the bomb which was being put together in the bedroom exploded.

The security forces in Northern Ireland are not as foolish and as willing to believe all that they are told as some politicians. Many of us who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland are concerned when we listen time after time in the Chamber to accounts that cannot be correct and find that Ministers, who are in possession of all the facts, are not prepared to relate them to the House and the country so that everyone is made aware of the truth. If they had made the facts known, many of the problems that we have encountered could have been avoided.

Many interesting and wise comments were made in the previous debate and the Baker report is a wise and reasonable document. I am gratified that there is a possibility of descheduling certain offences. As Northern Ireland Members carry out their constituency work, they come across cases—this is the experience of us all—where the scheduled procedure was not the appropriate line of action. Of course, there are dangers in all statutory sentences. When we direct ourselves to the consideration of new legislation, I hope that that factor will be well and truely taken care of and remedied.

In the previous debate there were complaints about aggrevation and harassment by members of the security forces. I have no doubt that we shall hear them again if certain Members catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Much of the alleged harassment and aggravation stems from occasions when they are seeking information and the individuals concerned are not prepared to give it. If we had a proper identity card system, all the information required would be available there and then. If someone was not prepared to carry his identity card and a small fine was applied regularly, he would no doubt learn quickly the error of his ways.

When the Government are considering the replacement of this valuable legislation, I hope that they will consider making the possession of a weapon which has been used for murder an offence in itself. This issue has been raised with the Government on many occasions, but, unfortunately, they have failed to act so far. We have only to think of the gun that was recovered at the Gransha hospital a couple of weeks ago to realise that weapons travel. A person who is found with a weapon that was used to commit murder must be presumed to have received it from another person. He did not find the weapon in his garden overnight; someone must have given it to him. If the person who received it knew that possession would of itself carry a heavy prison sentence, he might think twice before accepting responsibility for having it in his possession, let alone committing murder with it.

In the course of our work as constituency Members we have all talked to the police. We know as well as Ministers that weapons have been used for murder in different parts of Northern Ireland and have been transported throughout the Province. They have turned up again and again for the commission of murder. It seems that the IRA has a considerable number of weapons and tends to use only relatively few of them. As the weapons fall into the hands of the security forces, they are replaced. The IRA does not have a large number of weapons in use in all areas.

As a shooting man, I know how difficult it is to keep weapons in good condition. If a weapon becomes damp in the course of a day's shooting, it is necessary thereafter to clean and oil it and generally to take good care of it. Weapons that are used by terrorists have been found in many strange places and we can sssume that they have not received the good care that I have described. If terrorists have weapons that they wish to keep in good condition, they must keep them dry and oiled. The weapons that are in constant use do not receive that care. Therefore, the IRA tends to keep the bulk of its weapons safe and it is prepared at any time to sacrifice the few that are in constant use. For those reasons, the Government should look seriously at creating an offence of possession of a murder weapon.

The other matter that has not been covered, and should be covered, is the right of silence. It has concerned all of us in Northern Ireland for many years. Individuals are brought in, questioned and held, but steadfastly refuse to open their mouths. Those who are the godfathers—they were described as such by the late Airey Neave—are well known to the police. That has been happening in one form or another for many years. The godfathers are restricted to a fairly small number of people. They are the kingpins. Those who sit quietly, not doing anything themselves but directing, organising, recruiting and spreading their evil by every means at their disposal, should be an absolute top priority target for imprisonment. The silence behind which they hide is something that they

should not be allowed to go on using in future, as they have in the past. I hope that when we discuss the replacement legislation, we shall find something that will enable us to get at that relatively small group of key people in the IRA, and for that matter, in the Sinn Fein. They tend to turn up in both organisations with unfailing regularity.

I should like to give a relevant quotation from the Baker report. In paragraph 32, the good man who produced the report says:

"I hope I have understood and have given full weight to all such arguments in my detailed consideration of the powers but there are three points to be made clear now:

(1) There are others who attack the EPA, the security forces and the legal process including the judges and the courts, not for the ultimate purpose of preserving human rights and liberties but for sinister reasons."

That is why I opened my remarks with a review of a small number of the many cases that I have been aware of in the past. The attack of many people is not honest. When one sees the forces of law and order that keep society together in Ulster coming under attack, one immediately asks, at any rate in Northern Ireland, not what the published purpose is, but the real purpose, which is the one that the people making the allegations are unwilling to make public.

Baker continued:

"(2) I have felt increasingly the need for a society for the furtherance of human *duties* to counter-balance those who are, rightly, so valiant for human rights."

A long time ago, someone said that the pulpit was the last refuge of the scoundrel — [HON. MEMBERS: "Patriotism."] He did not mean genuine patriotism, so I left that bit out. For the information of hon. Members, it had not escaped my attention that the word "patriotism" was used.

The plain truth is that there are many people who hide behind the banner of human rights, and are interested only in taking away human rights, above all, the right that we all want—the right to life. I can see the odd head or two shaking, but perhaps those who shake their heads should question those with whom they march behind the banner of human rights. The House is the final guarantor of human rights in this nation. That is why we who are of the Unionist tradition want to sit in it. This is where our human rights are guaranteed. That is why we come here. That is why the person who does not come here does not do so. He is not interested in human rights. He is interested in his selfish rights, and in the selfish desires of those whom he represents.

Thirdly, Sir George Baker said:

"Nevertheless, I am completely unconvinced that if the EPA powers were, or were even substantially, abolished we would waken up next morning to universal sweet reason and an end to violence. Unfortunately they remain broadly necessary both to curb violence and to bring the guilty criminals to justice. The high probability of detection and subsequent conviction has always been regarded as the best deterrent."

That puts in a nutshell the vital reasons for maintaining this legislation. I believe that the legislation has been necessary, is necessary and, unfortunately, will continue to be necessary.

If anyone doubts the willingness of the IRA to murder those whom it would claim as its religious bedfellows, let him consider the punishment shootings, the murders of other Roman Catholics and the whole edifice of terrorism that the IRA has erected wherever it has become dominant, inflicting the most awful indignities on the population so as to drive them to their deaths or into the evil ways of which the activities of the IRA and Sinn Fein are the most blatant examples that this country has ever seen.

11.21 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I am delighted to be able to participate in this debate and to say that my colleagues and I will support the continuation of the legislation.

I remind hon. Members that, while we sit in the comfort of this House, members of the security forces are actively engaged in the defence of freedom and democracy in Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to their courage. Our minds should go to those who, in all kinds of weather, stand between us and the enemy. I am delighted that the voice of the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) is not heard in the Chamber, but I am sorrowful indeed that other hon. Members speak with that kind of voice and parrot many of the phrases of Republican propaganda, which should be condemned by every right-thinking Member of Parliament.

The House should be mindful of the families recently attacked by the IRA with murderous intent. Two members of the UDR are at this very moment fighting for their lives. That will not concern the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), because it is the result of his friends' activities. The whole House should condemn the action of the hon. Member for Islington, North. I hope that instead of running after petty Irish votes in his constituency he will in future think of the safety of the security forces and of every British citizen.

At this season of Christmas we should be thinking of the seven injured members of the UDR and especially the two who are so seriously ill. We should also remember the gallant member of the Army who recently lost his life on the Fermanagh border. It ill becomes any Member of the House to give succour or encouragement to murderous, butchering groups such as Sinn Fein and the fellow travellers of the IRA.

The legislation before us is important. The innocent Northern Ireland community continues to be subject to diabolical criminal attacks from republican men of blood —from terrorists whose only aim is the destruction of democracy and the denial of that right basic to any free society: the right to live. I trust that, after a resounding vote in the House tonight, there will be a continuance of the Act. I trust that Opposition Members will rise to the situation and defend freedom and democratic rights in Northern Ireland by ensuring that this legislation is retained.

I agree that the legislation should have been taken off the statute book long ago. But that can be done only when the situation permits it—when the men of murder and destruction have been defeated.

I was delighted to hear the Minister say that it was for the Government to eradicate the men of terror and the violent men in Northern Ireland. There can only be a future for democracy when the men of terror are removed from society.

When the choice was made in Londonderry between members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the SAS and members of the IRA, I am delighted to report that it was two IRA men who were carried out instead of two members of Her Majesty's forces. I make no apology to any hon. Member for clearly stating that view.

[Rev. William McCrea]

The fact that the legislation must be retained after so many years is an indictment of past Administrations. Normality has not been restored in the Province. The book of Revelation tells us how the souls under the altars cried out, "How long, O Lord". The House has a right to ask the Government tonight how long the situation is to be permitted to continue. We have a right to ask that the tragedy should be brought to a speedy conclusion.

Mr. Flannery: Alleluia.

Rev. William McCrea: I am glad that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) has taken up some of the words. Perhaps he will be converted, like Saul of Tarsus. Perhaps tonight we shall see the hon. Gentleman standing for the first time side by side with those hon. Members who believe in the continuance of democracy in Northern Ireland. Perhaps he will go through the right Lobby, instead of voting to support the men of terror and violence.

No doubt there are difficulties to be faced by the Secretary of State and the Ministers, but I believe that, until the right diagnosis is made, we cannot effect a cure. The Government must clearly state that the IRA can, must and will be defeated. Their determination must be clearly seen. I trust that, when the Minister replies to the debate, he will make it plain.

Alas, the cancer of terrorism is permitted to inflict sorrow and tragedy upon a long-suffering community. It ill becomes hon. Members to extend the courtesies of the House to members of Sinn Fein, when the same Sinn Fein and the IRA are inflicting continuous murder, violence and sorrow upon the people of Ulster.

Some people are wondering tonight whether their loved one — a member of the security forces or just an ordinary Protestant living near the Border — will be wrapped up in a shroud before Christmas and brought home in a coffin. Hon. Members should give absolute support to the members of the security forces.

In this Christmas season, the House should send its best wishes to the security forces in Northern Ireland, to the RUC and the RUC Reserve, in which we take pride and the Ulster Defence Regiment, which has served Her Majesty and Northern Ireland with absolute distinction. It has shown professionalism and bravery second to none. Last but by no means least we should send our best wishes to the rest of Her Majesty's Forces. I salute them and their courage and trust that they will have a peaceful and joyful Christmas. May 1985 bring us the peace that we have longed for.

Mr. Flannery: Alleluia.

11.30 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I admire the energy of the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea). He has followed our debates since 3.45 pm and this was his first opportunity to make a speech. I am aware that the Irish problem has been with us for many years and I do not wish in any way to detract from its seriousness, but I was not aware that it went back to the book of Revelation. Even if a solution to the problem came via Tarsus we should be grateful.

I remind hon. Members that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 was passed by a Labour Government. It was a consolidation measure. We accept that the emergency powers exist to combat sustained terrorist violence. Two years ago at this time, the debate took place against the sombre background of the Ballykelly bombing. One year ago it preceded the Harrods bomb but succeeded the assassination of Edgar Graham, to whom the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) referred in the previous debate. In the past few days, let alone weeks, a car bomb has exploded without warning outside a nightclub used by off-duty soldiers in Holywood, County Down with 60 lbs of nails, nuts and bolts in it, a gunman has been shot dead and a man has been captured by an RUC patrol after a land mine explosion caught a UDR Land Rover, injuring seven men, on a road outside Moy, County Armagh.

These are not anecdotal incidents but part of a pattern and a sad way of life which, as the Secretary of State said, are, we hope, diminishing. Nevertheless, they leave their trace and trail across Northern Ireland. In the Opposition's view, which I know is shared by the Government, there is no such thing as an acceptable level of violence. Nor can we allow terrorism to set the agenda for a political debate. That is not to say, however, that there should not be a political agenda or a political debate.

Much has been said about what are known as SOSPs — those who are held at the Secretary of State's pleasure. They are young people who could not be committed to life imprisonment because, at the time of their conviction, they were under 18. Witnesses told Sir George Baker of how demoralising it is for young people to be imprisoned without a release date, without hope and with nothing fixed to which they could look forward. All hon. Members have referred to that, as did the Secretary of State. The Opposition share that worry and look forward to some alleviation of the problem.

In the earlier debate we discussed Diplock courts and evidence given by the Cobden Trust to Sir George Baker. The Cobden Trust's sample for 1981 showed that 60 per cent. had been remanded for more than nine months before sentence and that almost 10 per cent. had been remanded for more than 15 months. In considering bail applications, judges paid little attention to the evidence against the accused. In addition, 40 per cent. of those tried in the Diplock courts have no connection with political violence, and 87 per cent. of those charged with robbery appeared to have carried out the alleged offences for ordinary criminal motives, and were, thus, denied their right to trial by jury.

The Opposition are extremely worried about civil liberties and civil rights. The Secretary of State said earlier that he would consider some of the amendments proposed by Sir George Baker. When the amendments come before the House, we shall examine them carefully and decide how to vote on them. However, as we look at what is before us now — trial without jury, conviction by a single judge—we have no alternative but to vote against the order. Voting for it would do more harm than good.

11.40 pm

Mr. Scott: I had hoped that, having gone through the catalogue of horrors in Northern Ireland, including recent events, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) would say that the Opposition had decided to support the renewal of the powers.

It has been common ground in virtually all parts of the House that we need exceptional measures to deal with an

exceptional situation. It is irresponsible for the Labour party to seek to deny us the necessary powers to deal with terrorism.

It is clearly not possible for me to cover every point raised in the debate. However, we have listened to all the comments made by hon. Members and we will bear them in mind when we shape our legislation.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) for the fact that he has not yet had a reply to his parliamentary question. He will get a reply, and a letter in response to the letter that he sent to me.

The campaign against strip searching in Armagh prison, which is carried on with great hysteria in this country and in the United States, is misguided and is based on false evidence of what happens at Armagh.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No. I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The impression has been given that every time a prisoner goes from Armagh to the court house nearby she is strip searched when she leaves and strip searched when she comes back. In the past two or three months the number of strip searches of those remand prisoners at Armagh has been running at two or three a month. Strip searching overall at Armagh this year is running at less than one strip search per prisoner per month. The progapanda campaign that has been run against the practice is a distortion of the facts.

The question of proscription was also raised.

Mr. Flannery: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I took a delegation to Armagh and we saw the books. The figures given by the Minister are wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Scott: I get a report every month.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Minister aware of the large number of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not abuse points of order.

Mr. Scott: The proscription of Sinn Fein is a matter which the Government keep under——

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will listen to the hon. Gentleman if he can satisfy me that he has a point of order.

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister has answered numerous parliamentary questions about strip searches. His replies show that they are continuing at Armagh and at other prisons in this country. He ought to be telling us what those answers were, rather than telling us what he believes the trend to be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a point of argument and not a point of order.

Mr. Scott: The proscription of Sinn Fein is kept under review, but I do not think that proscription is a weapon which should be used lightly. We are fighting to defend law and order and the democratic process, and freedom of speech is a fundamental part of that process.

I also do not think that the mere proscription of Sinn Fein would stop the present leaders of the organisation from continuing to say and do what they say and do now, though under the guise of another organisation; nor would it change the attitudes of those who support Sinn Fein or prevent them from expressing their support for extreme Republican views. This is a balanced judgment. It is something, as I have said, that the Government keep under review, but at the moment I think that we are right not to go down the road of proscription.

I know that the police study very carefully the statements that are made by Sinn Fein leaders to see whether they would justify action that might lead to a prosecution, and the adequacy of the law in this area, too, is kept under review.

I was asked about those detained at the Secretary of State's pleasure, but all that I would add to my remarks at the end of the previous debate is that I am very much aware of the uncertainty in the minds of all prisoners—and their families — who are serving indeterminate sentences. Very early in the new year I hope to produce a document that will be issued to prisoners, their families, and to organisations outside concerned with the welfare of prisoners, which will indicate how the review procedure works. We shall make it clear that in future prisoners will be able to submit written representations when their cases come up for review, and can then be told the outcome of the review or if the answer is that they are not to have a release date fixed, when the case will next be reviewed. In that way I hope that we can help at least to clear up much of the uncertainty that now bedevils the attitude of those serving indeterminate sentences.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) raised a detailed point about the second paragraph of the continuation order. It refers to those bits of the Act which, under section 33, do not lapse annually, and so do not need to be reviewed under this order. I shall certainly have another look at his point about the possession of murder weapons as we come to review all the provisions.

I end by echoing some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea). As we conclude the debate, it is right to pay a warm tribute to the judges, magistrates, policemen, soldiers and prison officers in Northern Ireland upon whom we all depend so much. At this time of the year in particular it is right to pay them that tribute. We need their protection. They stand between us and anarchy in Northern Ireland, and I pay a warm tribute to the work that they do on behalf of the community in Northern Ireland.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 37.

Division No. 60] **[11.42 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Begg, Roy
Benyon, William
Bigg-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*

Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Kilfedder, James A.
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
McCrea, Rev William
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powley, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Clay, Robert
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Hume, John
Lamond, James
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McNamara, Kevin
Marek, Dr John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Nellist, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Redmond, M.
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Norman Hogg and
Mr. John McWilliam.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Continuance) (No. 2) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

AGRICULTURE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the draft Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1984, which were laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Question agreed to.

SEA FISHERIES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the Fishing Vessels (Acquisition and Improvement) (Grant) (Amendment) Scheme 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1879), dated 29th November 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 3rd December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Question agreed to.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.)

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

That the Unfair Dismissal (Increase Compensation Limit) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 5th December, be approved.

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay Up-rating Order 1984, which was laid before this House on 10th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

11.53 pm

Sir Ian Percival (Stockport): I beg to ask leave to present to the House a petition from the residents of the town of Southport, which I have the honour to represent. It is signed by 2,150 persons. It was raised by members of the Merseyside community standards association, care campaigns, Life and the Elim Pentecostal church. It concerns one of the most important and difficult subjects to come before the House in my time. I congratulate those who have gone to the trouble of making their opinions known. I wish to let them and this House know that I share their concern.

In this petition, my constituents affirm that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living, individual human being. Therefore, they welcome the statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology—the Warnock report—that

"The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation"

and its recommendation that

"the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law."

My petitioners conclude:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Mr. Speaker, I beg to ask leave to present a petition in the name of the Rev. Sidney Garland, minister of Finaghy evanelical presbyterian church and signed by 5,944 of my constituents and some friends. Many of them are associated with Care Campaigns, Life, and the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children. Most important, they come from across the political and religious spectrum.

The petition welcomes the statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology—the Warnock report—that

"The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation",

and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law. I associate myself with those sentiments and the petitions's prayer, which reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Mr. Speaker, I beg to ask leave to present four petitions with well over 2,000 signatures, mainly from Cardiff, North, the constituency which I have the honour to represent. They are forthcoming in response to our Government's invitation to comment on the Warnock report. The petitions have been organised by Miss Dorothy Bird of Rhiwbina, Mrs. Brace Jones of Rhiwbina, Miss Jennifer Wilson on behalf of St. Mark's' church, Gabalfa, and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Dart of Whitchurch on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Cardiff.

I seek to present their petitions in great appreciation of the extremely important points they raise. There are many things that I could say about this subject, but this time I shall confine myself to the traditional quotation, which reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done soley for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I beg to ask leave to present two petitions on the protection of the human embryo, one in the name of Douglas Reed of 67 Park road, Didcot, signed by 1,397 signatories, and the other signed by 153 signatories from Wantage and its surrounding districts. The petitioners pray that,

the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

The weight of opinion represented by these and other petitions should be taken fully into account by the Government and the House in the framing of legislation on this important subject, which touches the consciences of so many people.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Michael Hirst (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of 4,441 of my constituents. The petition was initiated by Mrs. Phoebe McAuley of Lenzie, Kirkintilloch, near Glasgow, who is the secretary of the Strathkelvin branch of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children. I warmly support the prayer of my petitioners, that,

the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): I beg to ask leave to present three petitions from residents in and around the Lewisham, East constituency. The first petition was initiated by Miss Elizabeth Fleming of 47 Lock chase in Blackheath; the second was initiated by Miss Sheila Dunn of 74 Heathlee road in Blackheath; the third was initiated by Dr. and Mrs. McAllister of 21 LeMay avenue in Grove Park, the latter containing 3,565 signatures. The size of the response reflects the great concern felt by my constituents on this subject.

All three petitions are couched in identical terms and are entitled, "Petition for the protection of the human embryo". My constituents are responding to the Government's invitation to comment on the report of the Warnock committee. My petitioners welcome the statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology that,

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

"The status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation".

and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law. My petitioners conclude:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Myasthenia Gravis

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

12.2 am

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): The phrase "myasthenia gravis" casually dropped during conversation is calculated to bring it to an immediate halt. The inevitable response is, "What on earth is myasthenia gravis"? Had I been faced with the phrase on any date before 11 November this year, my response, too, would have been, "What on earth is myasthenia gravis"? But on that date the phrase intruded into my life out of the blue, in the same way as it has intruded from time to time into the lives of comparatively few families in Britain.

Myasthenia gravis is a serious muscle weakness. In technical terms, it is a neuro-muscular disorder that is due to a defect in the action at the nerve ending. It prevents the brain from effectively controlling several groups of muscles, especially in the face and throat. It is a rare complaint, fortunately. It affects about one in 20,000. In my constituency there should be no more than three or four cases.

Usually a GP will see only one or two cases in his professional life. Fortunately, it is neither contagious nor infectious and it is rare for more than one member of a family to be affected. If by chance the mother should suffer from it when the child is born, within a few weeks the symptoms normally fade away.

It is one of the oddest, most frustrating and infuriating of medical conditions known to mankind. For that reason, my prime purpose is to give publicity to the disorder so that the cloak of ignorance which has shrouded it might be lifted.

The symptoms are usually slight at first, but they gradually become worse. They have a characteristic distribution, starting with drooping eyelids, double vision, difficulty in swallowing or speaking, a general weakness and feeling of fatigue or difficulty in breathing and raising the arms. Many are the symptoms that any hypochondriac might have—especially after an all-night sitting.

The disorder has no respect for age. It is most common at the age of 20 years. For men the peak is between 50 and 60 years. Below that age women usually outnumber men, but among older people men are the principal sufferers.

Delay and inaccuracy in diagnosis is often an insult added to the injury of myasthenia sufferers. The symptoms vary in type and severity. A myasthenic might have one symptom, or a combination of symptoms, but rarely all of them. In the early stages the symptoms are slight and gradual. They become worse in the afternoon or evening and they tend to improve in the morning or after rest.

The symptoms are aggravated by weather changes, by heat, cold or extremes of emotion. No two myasthenic sufferers are alike. Their symptoms are not necessarily the same on different days. They exhibit a variable pattern. With such a wide variety of symptoms suffered by the same person, let alone symptoms shown by different people, it is not surprising that mistakes in diagnosis occur not infrequently. Some cases are not diagnosed at all.

The inability to smile or slurred speech are often diagnosed as depression, neurosis or stress. Patients are often bewildered by the change in their condition. They go to their doctor, rest in the surgery and suddenly feel much better. They are confused and feel fraudulent when

they face their GP and try to describe their symptoms. Often the condition leads to the psychiatrist and the speech therapist instead of the neurologist and thoracic surgeon.

Sadly, what is physical is often diagnosed as mental. A simple diagnostic test is now available which shows beyond peradventure that the patient suffers from this condition. A simple injection of the drug tensilon will clear the symptoms and indicate the presence of the disorder. There is a crucial need for the medical profession to be more aware of these difficulties and to identify the disorder earlier.

An experiment was carried out in Essex by interested parties who distributed leaflets in one locality. That little exercise showed that three people formerly not known to be suffering from the condition were diagnosed as myasthenics. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State assure the House that his Department is giving sufficient publicity to programmes aimed at general practitioners in particular and the public in general to ensure that there is sufficient knowledge of this condition and to alleviate the unnecessary suffering undergone by some people?

For the people who suffer from the disorder—a child cannot run or play, the smile is suddenly wiped off the face of a young girl, a woman cannot comb her hair and a man cannot hold a razor—the condition is a tragedy, and for their families it is a source of deep sadness. The condition is especially flummoxing because its exact cause is unknown. The evidence points to an immunological disease in which the body's immune system goes wrong and starts rejecting its own tissue. To date, the exact mechanism behind the disease has not been located.

Fortunately, nowadays, there are effective means of treatment—it was not always so. Today, two types of treatment afford considerable improvement, if not complete remission. First, surgery and the removal of the thymus gland, which is located in the upper part of the chest, often completely eliminate the symptons and they substantially improve the condition in about 80 per cent. of cases. It involves a period in intensive care, but most patients are discharged by the end of the second or third week. Fortunately, if that method of treatment is not appropriate, drugs usually are. They can improve the strength of the patient and the affected muscles, although they do not always restore the patient to full power.

One of the many crosses that myasthenics have to bear is the need to ensure that the drugs they take do not aggravate their symptons. Drugs regularly prescribed for heart ailments, barbiturates and some antibiotics have an aggravating effect. I am happy to be able to say that, fortunately, modern treatment has returned most patients to productive lives. This has transformed the position in recent years. Before the last war, 85 per cent. of patients died; the proportion fell to 15 per cent. and it has fallen still further recently. The condition of the vast majority of patients can be substantially improved with drugs or surgery.

Sufferers are entitled to certain benefits. Those benefits are by no means clear. Because of the variety and intensity of the symptons, some myasthenics have problems in persuading the DHSS that their disability entitles them to a mobility allowance. One day they are severely immobile, the next they are completely mobile. I ask my hon. Friend to consider whether myasthenia sufferers are satisfactorily categorised for benefit, particularly mobility allowance.

In the past 10 years research has taken a remarkable step forward. In 1973, Messrs. Patrick and Lindstrom of the Salk institute found that rabbits that were immunised with the electric organ of an electric eel developed a condition that was apparently identical to that of myasthenia sufferers. The rabbits became floppy, but after a time when the symptoms had worn off they became frisky. At about the same time in research into the same disease an advance was made with regard to snake toxins from the venom of the Indian cobra which was found to contain a component which induced, not surprisingly, instantaneous myasthenia in the victim.

Those two separate advances have enabled vast strides to be made in the understanding and treatment of myasthenia in the past 10 years and established what until then had been merely theory—that myasthenia gravis is a disease of the autoimmune system. That showed the importance in this disease as with many other diseases, of properly controlled animal experiments. Will animal libbers please note and take to heart those examples of where there has been considerable relief in human suffering from properly monitored experiments carried out on animals in humane circumstances?

In the next few years we look forward to seeing identified drugs which will be able to control the triggering factors in the disorder. Myasthenia blood cells can now be cultivated in the laboratory so that the human disease can be studied in test tubes. The objective is to find a drug which will be selective in its operation and switch off the unwanted self-destructive response while leaving all the other immune responses intact.

In this, as probably with all other research, the cry is for more money. I hope that my hon. Friend can assure the House, not as to the amount of money but as to its effective use.

The British Association of Myasthenics was set up in 1975 as a branch of the muscular dystrophy group. It is a voluntary organisation. It aims to relieve and comfort those who suffer from this disorder, to bring them together and to promote self help. At present large numbers of myasthenics remain isolated or undiagnosed. The association seeks to educate the public and locate as many myasthenics as possible. It acts as a reminder to the medical profession and the ancillary services of this disorder by improving diagnosis time, treatment and services. It does splendid work with modest resources. I compliment the association on its wholly admirable work, and particularly on its fund-raising for research.

Great work is done at the University College hospital in Gower street and at the Royal Free hospital in London, but it is perhaps invidious to select two out of so many National Health Hospitals as so many medical staffs, many members of the social services and researchers are striving for the day in the not-too-distant future when myasthenia gravis is no longer a conversation stopper, and when myasthenia will no longer be gravis but simply myasthenia.

12.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Spencer), for giving us the opportunity of this debate and for drawing myasthenia gravis to the attention of the House and to a wider public.

[Mr. Whitney]

As my hon. and learned Friend has said, this is fortunately a comparatively rare disease, and the causes of it are unknown, but it is thought that they are related in some way to a disorder of the thymus gland, which leads to a breakdown in immune tolerance. It is classed as one of the autoimmune diseases, along with multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy, which means that the body produces its own antibodies, which then attack healthy tissue. The main symptom is that the muscles tire very quickly so that the patient finds it difficult and sometimes impossible to make normal movements; not just limb movements, as in standing, walking and carrying things, but movements in the face, and throat, which affect talking, chewing and swallowing, and in severe cases breathing. As my hon. and learned Friend said the symptoms of the disease fluctuate in intensity, and there are usually long periods of remission, particularly during the early years.

My hon. and learned Friend correctly said that one of the main problems associated with myasthenia gravis is the difficulty of initial diagnosis. During its early stages the symptoms may occur only as a result of extreme physical activity or emotional stress, and they disappear again after rest. This means that when the patient is examined by the doctor, it will be unlikely that the patient will be exhibiting any symptoms. The doctors will therefore have to rely upon the patient's own accounts and the diagnosis will have to be made retrospectively.

The doctor's initial impression is likely to be that the muscular weakness that the patient describes is either the direct result of exercise that has been somewhat overdone, or, if what precipitated the symptoms was emotional stress, that it is some sort of psychosomatic disorder. It is likely to be only after several consultations that the likelihood of myasthenia gravis is considered.

I am glad to be able to reassure my hon. and learned Friend that all general practitioners learn about neurology during their training, and that in the course of this attention is given to myasthenia gravis, but I would emphasise that, because it is such a rare disease, it is very difficult for general practitioners to build up any expertise. Indeed, it is probable that the majority of general practitioners will not encounter a single instance of the disease during the whole of their careers.

Myasthenia gravis is, of course, not the only disease to encounter such difficulties of early diagnosis. The more common neuromuscular diseases, such as multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy, can also present initially "flitting" symptoms; and diagnosis in these patients is often made only after several attacks, and confirmed by referral to a hospital specialist.

We recognise that these are real problems. In retrospect it is easy to cast some blame on doctors for failing to make the right diagnosis, but it is remarkably difficult for them to do so at the time. My hon. and learned Friend asked about the possibility of some special initiative to inform doctors of the symptoms of myasthenia gravis in order to improve diagnosis. I must make it clear that it is the responsibility of individual doctors to ensure that they are adequately informed within their areas of interest, and to keep themselves informed on clinical and scientific developments, so this is a matter for the medical profession rather than for my Department. There are a number of established mechanisms for enabling doctors to keep up to date; for example, through medical journals and scientific papers, through conferences and seminars, and where appropriate through postgraduate training. I have no reason to believe that these mechanisms are inadequate in respect of myasthenia gravis.

Once a diagnosis has been made, the best prospect for a permanent cure is the surgical removal of the affected thymus gland, but that is likely to be effective only if a patient is comparatively young and only if the onset of myasthenia gravis is comparatively recent. Otherwise, the course of the disease is characterised by spontaneous remission of varying but diminishing duration, and the course of treatment at that point is directed towards controlling the symptoms.

Treatment of the symptoms is normally by drug therapy, usually by neostigmine and steroids, and those are usually very successful, though they may need to be administered together with other drugs to control possible side effects. The patient's management of his own lifestyle is an important aspect of keeping the symptoms under control, and patients will be advised to keep fatigue and stress to an absolute minimum.

One recently developed treatment for the relief of very severe myasthenia gravis symptoms is plasmapherisis, which is a process of, in lay language, washing a patient's blood to remove the antibodies that are causing the damage. The plasma content of the patient's blood is removed and then replaced with plasma products collected from the blood given by blood donors. This treatment is indicated only when the patient is seen to be moving towards a paralytic crisis. It is a very effective treatment in the short term, but there is no evidence that the beneficial effects of the treatment are long lasting. It is for health authorities to decide whether or not to make that treatment available, having regard to the other demands on their resources.

Apart from plasmapherisis, facilities for the treatment of the disease are generally available. Facilities for drug therapy and surgical facilities for thymectomy are not limited to a small number for hospitals, and there is no evidence of difficulties in making treatment available once a diagnosis of myasthenia gravis has been made.

My hon. and learned Friend referred to the social security benefits available to people suffering from the disease, and I should like to make some comments on this issue. The main social security benefits and allowances for disabled people are not based on the particular disabling condition, but on the extent to which a person's everyday life is affected. For example, there is attendance allowance for those who need a lot of care and attention, and mobility allowance — to which my hon. and learned Friend specifically referred — for those who are unable, or virtually unable, to walk.

The legislation does not define virtual inability to walk, but the factors to be taken into account are the distance, speed, length of time and manner in which a person can walk without severe discomfort. Each claim is decided according to individual circumstances on the basis of a medical examination. Decisions on claims for mobility allowance are made by the independent adjudicating authorities, and there is a system of appeal for those who are dissatisfied with the decision.

I am not aware that those who suffer from myasthenia gravis are encountering any particular difficulties, but I emphasise that, in view of the independence of the

adjudication system, neither Ministers nor officials of the Department can interfere with the decision given on an individual claim.

I was pleased that my hon. and learned Friend raised the matter of research into myasthenia gravis. I was also pleased that he referred to the work of Patrick and Lindstrom, and I should like to add another name to the list of research workers to whom myasthenia gravis sufferers have reason to be grateful, that of Professor Eric Barnard of Imperial college. In myasthenia gravis, the body produces antibodies against acetylcholine receptors, and the effect is that messages passed along the nerves may not reach their destinations, as they are blocked by the antibodies at the nerve endings. That prevents the muscles from working properly. What Professor Barnard has managed to do, supported by the Medical Research Council and the Muscular Dystrophy Group, is to isolate the gene for the acetylcholine receptor. This important advance means that research and work on the fundamental basis of the disease can also be pursued. Research into other autoimmune diseases, and into muscular dystrophy and other genetic disorders, is being pursued in many centres, and this research may well have spin-offs for myasthenia gravis.

I should like to end as I began, by paying tribute to my hon. and learned Friend for bringing this disease to the attention of the House. I assure him that I shall make certain that my colleagues, the Health Ministers at the Department of Health and Social Security, and the officials and specialist experts in our Department, take good note of the points that he made. We shall study carefully all that he has said, and of course we shall be willing to continue our dialogue with him about the disease. Finally, I put on record my appreciation of the scientific work that is being done in identifying the causes of the disease, which is a prerequisite for any permanent cure.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 December 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

9.35 am

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I have pleasure in presenting to the House a petition entitled "Petition for the Protection of the Human Embryo". It has been signed by over 4,500 of my constituents who feel strongly about the need to enshrine in legislation protection for the human embryo as a real, living, individual human being and the need to oppose those practices which violate his or her human dignity and right to life.

The petition continues:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as is duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I beg to ask leave of the House to present a petition, signed by 3,564 of my constituents, which is in similar terms to that presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). I fully support the petition, which reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryos concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I have the pleasure to present on behalf of 1,359 of my constituents in Hornchurch a petition in similar terms to that of my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) which concludes:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I wish to present a petition to the House on behalf of many hundreds of my constituents, some of whom are still sending me copies of this petition, in similar terms to that introduced by the hon. Members for Faversham (Mr. Moate), for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). This is a particularly apt time for these petitioners to come forward when people who have been involved in this type of work and experimentation are suggesting that even some of the restrictions proposed by the Warnock committee should not be accepted and, further, that it should be possible to implant human embryos into the bodies of animals.

The petition continues:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I beg to ask leave to present a petition entitled "Petition for the protection of the human embryo", signed by 2,200 of my constituents in Stratford-on-Avon who have expressed concern over the contents of the Warnock report. I share their concern.

The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Later—

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I beg to ask leave to present three petitions from residents in Romsey and Waterside entitled "Petition for the protection of the human embryo". The first was initiated by Mrs. J. Mason of 153 Woodlands road, Ashurst and contains 1,205 signatures; the second by Mr. C. F. Mackrell of 16 Fox Hills, Totton, and bears 25 signatures; the third by Mrs. E. M. Hurst of Bryn-Gower, Awbridge, and bears 29 signatures. All are in identical terms.

They affirm the petitioners' belief that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real living individual human being and they oppose all practices which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity and right to life.

The petition continues:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): It is my pleasure to present to the House a petition for the protection of the human embryo which has been presented to me by my constituent Peta Peeris of 4 Rutherglen walk, Eaglescliffe, Cleveland, and almost 2,000 other constituents. It gives me pleasure to present the petition to the House and I hope that the Ministers responsible will take into account the strength of feeling expressed by my and many other constituents on this vital issue.

To lie upon the Table.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I have pleasure to present the House a petition, signed by over 1,800 people in my constituency and handed to me at the end of a large and successful public meeting, in the following terms:

We the undersigned people living or working in the Parliamentay Constituency of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, do hereby call on the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom to urge Her Majesty's Government to call for a world-wide halt to the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems as a meaningful first step to reduction in nuclear arms.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray etc.

The petition has my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

Torture

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): I wish to present a petition signed by some 20,000 people from my constituency and other parts of the United Kingdom and including, on my reckoning, at least 35 bishops, supporting Amnesty International's campaign against torture.

The petition urges Her Majesty's Government

to support an effective United Nations convention against torture and in particular the extension of compensation for torture victims to include anyone who has been the victim of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; to support proposals, both at the United Nations and at the Council of Europe, to create an international commission to make unannounced visits to any place of detention; to intercede whenever and wherever possible on behalf of prisoners being tortured.

The petition has my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

National Health Service (Privatisation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

9.43 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This short debate on privatisation in the National Health Service comes at the end of a week when the Government announced that they had appointed Mr. Victor Paige to the chair of the NHS management board. I understand that he is a subscriber to BUPA—the private medicine scheme. Therefore, he shows his commitment to the NHS in that alone. It later emerged, under close questioning of DHSS officials and Ministers, that he is being paid £70,000 per annum, which is about £1,500 a week. At the same time, the wage for most domestics and cleaners in NHS hospitals is £1·72 per hour. Indeed, cleaners at the Barking general hospital have had their wages reduced to such a level that they are now being offered £17 per week by a private cleaning company.

That shows the sort of contrast that we are facing within the NHS. The Government are prepared to spend such a large amount of money on appointing someone to streamline the NHS and at the same time they continue to pay disgracefully low wages to people working within the NHS. They threaten those people's jobs and existence by the promotion of privatisation within the NHS. The Government have an obsession with privatisation which is matched only by their obsessional hatred for trade unions in general. In an article in *The Guardian*, the Under-Secretary said that he hoped that in a few years people would wonder what all the fuss was about over contracting out of services in the NHS. In what poses for a philosophical piece, he went on to ask who should wash the sheets in NHS hospitals and whether that really mattered. It cannot matter much to the Minister concerned, but it matters a great deal to those who work in the NHS. It also matters a great deal to those who use and rely on the NHS and wish to be able to continue to rely on it.

Many, not necessarily Labour Members, but people in trade unions and others all round the country, believe strongly that if the NHS means anything it means a comprehensive Health Service which can take care of everybody within the community and which can provide a full Health Service under some form of democratic control. I want to see changes in the structure of the NHS to enable greater democratic control to be obtained, but I also believe that by contracting out of any particular services within the NHS that control is weakened and the service is weakened and seriously damaged.

The Government's plans for privatisation within the NHS go back some years. It is interesting to note—the Minister may care to refute this—that as far as I am aware there is no legal power whatever to make a district or regional health authority privatise any of its services. But there is an enormous amount of cajoling, arm-twisting and blatant brow-beating of individual members of district health authorities. Letters are frequently sent from the Under-Secretary of State to the chairmen of the regional and district health authorities saying whether their performance is satisfactory.

Let me quote from one, signed by the Minister, to Dame Betty Paterson, the chairman of the North-West Thames regional health authority. After saying that he is

pleased at the level of commitment shown to competitive tendering by some districts in the region, he goes on to say:

"For the other districts you no doubt have action in hand to secure satisfactory programmes. Could I now ask you to get in touch immediately with those districts to inform them that their programmes are not acceptable to Ministers, and if they are not already doing so, to seek urgent action to improve that? I would like a further report from you by 17 September at the latest giving revised programmes for those districts, or, exceptionally, where this is not possible, a report of the action in hand to obtain satisfactory programmes."

The Minister does not say in that letter what he plans to do if he does not get satisfactory replies from those districts or if they do not go out to competitive tendering. But we know full well that he looks closely at the appointment of members of district health authorities. He looks closely at the form of tendering that is put forward by those authorities which eventually succumb to his iron fist and his threats. The Minister then goes on to encourage them to privatise. In privatising, he opposes the use of NHS wages and conditions and the use of the fair wages resolution which the Government have been kind enough to abolish so that there is now no minimum protection for the lowest-paid, predominantly women workers in Britain. The Government are then surprised when there is opposition to this disgraceful programme of destroying people's jobs.

Opposition comes from many people. Let me quote from a letter. Many will be surprised where it has come from. It is from someone who has resigned from a district health authority and says:

"My immediate occasion for taking this step is the so-called privatisation of the hospital cleaning services and the terms of the contract that we have accepted. You will recollect that when privatisation was first proposed, I expressed the view that for the hospital to be run in the spirit that it should be for the patients' sake, we ought to be concerned that all those working in it, and particularly those with direct contact with patients, should enjoy terms of service that would enable them to focus their main concern on the wellbeing of the public rather than their own. I believe that to save money by further separating the status of the professional from that of the ancillary staff would not serve this end if it means employing the latter as semi-casual labour. Certainly in my wards we value very highly the responsible and loyal work of our cleaners and the personal help that they often give to our patients and their parents."

That letter is not from a district officer of the National Union of Public Employees, which sponsors me in this House, or from any other union within the National Health Service. It is from Professor J. A. Davies, the professor of paediatrics at the University of Cambridge clinical school, department of paediatrics. He is passionately concerned about his patients in the National Health Service and is not prepared to see the service destroyed.

Throughout the country there have been a number of disputes on the issue of privatisation of jobs within the National Health Service. The Minister might sigh, as he sits down to his Christmas lunch next Tuesday, "Thank goodness I have not got to worry about Barking, Hammersmith, Addenbrooke's, High Royds, or any other hospital," but I warn him that if the Government continue on their ludicrous course of destroying employment prospects for part-time women workers in the National Health Service, and of destroying the Health Service by handing it over to their friends in the private contracting industry, they will have not three or four disputes on their hands next year but hundreds. Workers in the National Health Service, who have shown enormous dedication and loyalty to the patients, will show that they are not prepared to see their jobs destroyed.

The strike which has been running the longest is that at Barking hospital, which comes within the Redbridge district health authority. It has lasted almost as long as the miners' strike, and it is about the proposal of the contract cleaning company concerned, Crothalls, to make cuts of 40 per cent. to 60 per cent. in wages, and changes in working practices. The total hours of 87 cleaners in the hospital were to be cut by the same proportion—by 41 per cent., from 2,189 to 1,313 a week. Women earning £57 a week were expected to take cuts in hours which would mean that they would take home only £17 a week. Yet the Government show surprise at the opposition to the proposals, which involve the worsening of conditions with less sick leave, less holiday pay, less maternity leave and so on. Conditions which have been argued and fought for within the National Health Service for a long time are destroyed by privatisation.

At the Barking general hospital there have been numerous reports by people working in the hospital who are qualified to judge environmental health conditions. They say that the hospital is in a dirty, disgraceful and dangerous state, and will continue to be so as long as the authority allows a company such as Crothalls to continue to use very low-paid and unskilled labour, while other people are forced to stand outside the hospital on the picket line, trying to get themselves a decent living wage. The charge against the Government is that they are destroying the living standards of many very low-paid part-time workers within the National Health Service.

Recently there was a dispute at the Hammersmith hospital, which comes under the Hammersmith special health authority. The contract that was offered involved a cut in hours from 6,170 to 2,802 per week. Jobs were to be cut from 207 to 158, and full-time jobs were to be reduced from 122 to 28. There were to be only two weeks' annual leave after six months' service, instead of the usual NHS conditions. Disputes of that sort arise frequently throughout the country, and there will be more of them.

There is a dispute at Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge where Professor Davies has resigned from the health authority in disgust at the way that the Government have forced privatisation on the National Health Service. The strikers are standing outside the gates at Addenbrooke's hospital because they want the people who work there to have decent working conditions, decent standards of service and decent wages.

There are many question marks over the companies which are involved in contract cleaning, contract catering and other forms of contracting business. The firm involved in the Addenbrooke's dispute, OCS, has very limited experience of hospital cleaning, as have many other contract cleaning companies. They line up outside district health authority meetings and offer themselves as the lowest bidder for the cleaning contract in each year in each district health authority.

The National Health Service was set up to provide health care for the people of Britain. The health authorities were set up to ensure that there would be a healthy population. Under privatisation, the district health authorities become conveyancing mechanisms for passing money from the public purse into the private purse. They become a mechanism for making huge profits out of low wages and inadequate and inferior service. The authorities

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

will rue the day when they realise how much damage they have done to the National Health Service, and to the lives of so many people who have given long and dedicated service to health authorities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security(Mr. John Patten): The NHS hospitals are treating more patients than they have ever treated.

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister can hardly contain his excitement at this point. I shall gladly give way to him if he has something useful to say.

There are numerous examples of the failure of contract cleaners in hospitals all over Britain. I have been unable to find any cleaning contract in any part of the NHS that has not been beset by problems of greater or lesser magnitude. Hospital administrators and health authorities are concerned that they have very limited control over the standards and the methods of cleaning in hospitals.

If the Government feel proud of their performance on cleaning, what will it be like when they move on to the privatisation of the catering services, and as we see the incompetence of some of the private catering companies as they try to provide special diets which they are not qualified or capable of doing? They have not the experience of the people who work directly in the NHS.

High Royds hospital, which is within the Leeds western district health authority, is a 900-bed hospital for the mentally ill. The authority terminated the contract with Home Counties Cleaning Group because of low standards and gave the new contract to Hospital Hygiene Services. A *Sunday Times* report in June 1984 said that Dr. Terry Nelson, head of the hospital's medical services committee, had complained to managers about the erratic standards of the contractors. One senior nurse had complained of faeces, urine and vomit on the floors, which remained uncleaned, and there were numerous other examples of the failure of that contract. As a result, the contractors were eventually changed.

At Hinchingbrooke hospital, which is within the Huntingdon district health authority, the contract for cleaning was run by B. A. Lester when the new hosptial opened in 1983. A report by Dr. William Newsen, a bacteriologist at Papworth hospital, in January 1984, records high levels of dust in clinical areas, including laboratories. He states:

"The contractor is in breach of the contract in failing to use impregnated mops. Mops with over one inch of dust were found in the cupboards. We grew coagulate positive staphylococci, i.e. potential disease producers from three samples of the dust in the Nursery and Rowan wards."

That is not an untypical example of what happens when contract cleaning companies, with their lack of experience, work in NHS hospitals.

Why are the Government so obsessed with privatisation in NHS hospitals when they know the damage that is done by contracting services? The Government claim that the purpose of privatisation is to save money for the NHS and to allow more money to be spent on patient care. That is patently not proving to be the case. The Government have not created jobs. They have reduced wages and they have allowed enormous profits to be made by private cleaning companies. There has been a greater cost on the public purse at the other end of the DHSS, as former NHS workers become unemployed when they could be doing a good job in NHS hospitals.

My union, NUPE, has commented:

"This massacre of earnings, conditions and cleaning standards will be faced by thousands of health workers in the year ahead."

That is exactly what is happening.

There are likely to be fewer jobs in the NHS and fewer jobs in total in contract cleaning services in hospitals as privatisation goes on. Fundamentally, the motive for privatisation is very different from the motive set up and led the National Health Service for so many years. Those contract cleaning companies are concerned to make money out of the NHS and are not concerned primarily with patient care, which is what those who work in the NHS are concerned with.

In pushing privatisation in the way that they have, the Government have ensured that wage levels are automatically lower. They have ensured that every year or every two years, whatever the contract period is, workers in NHS hospitals have to sell themselves to the lowest bidder who is prepared to exploit them and to exploit the NHS at the same time.

I have some examples of the pay and conditions offered by the Merton and Sutton health authority. When the Government say that in-house tenders are acceptable and that they are prepared to allow them to be considered, it is interesting to note that they deliberately say also that Whitley agreements are not binding on contract cleaners, but they know perfectly well that they are likely to be in any in-house tenders. It is a Hobson's choice for workers in the NHS. Either they accept the in-house tender, which probably will be on NHS wages and conditions but certainly will mean much lower staffing levels, more difficult hours of work and generally inferior working conditions, or they can go out to a private cleaning company where they will get what the Government euphemistically call "the going rate" for cleaning work, which is the most exploited section of the market. The Government have an obsession with exploiting part-time women workers, and the opposition to them is mounting.

Very little publicity is given by the Government to the reports which come out regularly about the way that contracts have failed. I have an excellent report published by the west midlands regional TUC health services co-ordinating committee. It is described as a preliminary report on the 47 companies approved by the West Midlands regional health authority as being eligible to tender for contracts within the NHS for catering, domestic and laundry services. It goes through in excruciating detail the background to these companies, who the shareholders are, who put up the money for them and the number of Conservative MPs who have shares in them—a matter that was referred to in the House during the debate on the NHS in July. The co-ordinating committee feels, quite rightly, first that there is no contract which has been successful and approved of fully by any district health authority, and, secondly, that there are untold elements of corruption or the potential for corruption within the contract cleaning process and the privatisation of NHS services.

This Government are intent on destroying the NHS in many ways — by cuts, by privatisation and by the promotion of private medicine. They are also destroying the working conditions of many people who have given loyal service to the NHS for many years. For example, on

7 December this year, which is fairly up to date, of the 240 health authorities and boards, 14 were not complying and 26 had adopted fair wages clauses. As we look through the contracts increasingly being awarded, lower and lower wages are being offered as the Government use the hammer of the dole queue to force down wages of part-time workers in the NHS and to destroy the service by the same process.

It is a scandal of the highest proportions. Here we are on the eve of Christmas. The Minister might have a little compassion, although I have my doubts, and think of the fear in the minds of thousands of NHS employees next year when privatisation is threatened, with their jobs being taken away, their livelihoods destroyed and their being forced to work for private cleaning companies on lower wages and with longer hours and worse and worse working conditions.

The Government believe in the free market economy. For many of the poorest of our people, that means poverty and the dole queue. That is what the Government are trying to do through privatisation. But I can assure them that the workers in the NHS who have loyally supported the service for so long will continue to oppose privatisation. There will be disputes and there will be opposition for as long as the Government are in office. They look forward to its being replaced by a Labour Government who are determined to provide good, decent working conditions and a good, decent NHS.

10.5 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): The hon. Member for Islington, North, (Mr. Corbyn) has not exactly enhanced his reputation in the House in recent days, and I have just listened to one of the most unpleasant speeches that I have had to sit through in my five years here. The hon. Gentleman raised groundless fears and made groundless allegations. His speech was a tissue of allegations without substance.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has been in his place on the Opposition Front Bench throughout his hon. Friend's speech. I do not seek to do the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras any personal or political damage when I say that there is a wide gap between the way in which he and his hon. Friend express their strongly held views on this issue. I always listen to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras because he talks reasonably about these issues rather than in the fatuous way that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Islington, North, who demonstrated clearly the different attitudes to the NHS between him and other right hon. and hon. Members.

Government supporters regard the NHS as being there primarily to provide a service for patients, and for no one else. We are proud that this year the NHS is treating more patients than ever before. From what the hon. Gentleman said with his repeated references to the trade union that sponsors him in the House and to the needs of trade unionists, it is clear that he believes that the NHS exists primarily for the benefit of the staff. Ancillary workers do an excellent job in the NHS, but it is the patients whom the service seeks to serve most of all. There is an unbridgeable gap between me and the hon. Member for Islington, North. Sadly, with his curious perception of the NHS, the hon. Gentleman has completely missed the point of our competitive tendering policy.

Our policy is about competitive tendering. It is not about privatisation pure and simple, because that is not its purpose. We have called for competitive tendering in the NHS to test the way in which it provides catering, cleaning and laundry services. It is a very successful policy.

We have asked domestic, catering and laundry services, which cost the NHS about £1 billion a year, to subject themselves to the same close scrutiny as that to which the private sector is subjected. It might be more comfortable to leave matters as they are. But, for too long, health authorities have accepted without question that they should provide services in hospitals by direct labour when for years they should have been asking what is the best way of providing those services in the interests of the needs of patients.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: I have only a very short time. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way to him. I must try to reply to those matters that his hon. Friend raised.

Mr. Dobson: I do not think that I will forgive the Minister.

Mr. Patten: Health authorities should have been asking themselves what is the most cost-effective way of providing these services, because the NHS——

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Patten: ——is not in the business of providing laundry, catering or hospital services.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. If I did, it might encourage his hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North to seek to intervene and, while I am prepared formally to answer his debate, I am not prepared, after what he has done in recent weeks, to extend to him any of the normal courtesies.

If we had allowed matters to carry on as they were in the NHS, we would have missed a golden opportunity to save money that could be spent on patients. That is what this policy is about. I fail to see the logic of the complaints of the hon. Member for Islington, North. Is he saying that he does not wish to have patient services improved and that the money saved on these services should not be spent on patients? That is ludicrous.

We have told health authorities that, through competitive tendering, they should check that they are getting the best possible deal, and that they should get services provided by whoever can provide them best—in the interests of the service and of patients—whether that is a contractor or the excellent NHS in-house staff.

If a hospital's own service and staff can provide what is necessary, that is a good thing. If not, someone from the private sector should be given the opportunity. There is nothing dogmatic about that. It is a fair and even-handed policy, which is leading to substantial savings. Costs in the NHS are reduced when contracts are awarded within the service as a result of tendering.

We already have evidence that substantial savings are being made, not only by letting contracts to the private sector, but by driving down the cost of providing services within the NHS. For example, 37 contracts have been let privately and have resulted in annual savings of about £6·5 million for health authorities.

Mr. Dobson: Publish the evidence.

Mr. Patten: Two of the contracts have saved over £1 million a year.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not contrary to our rules for the Minister to mislead the House? He is asserting that savings have been made——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not accuse another hon. Member of deliberately misleading the House. He must withdraw that statement.

Mr. Dobson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your advice about what I should do if I have reason to believe that what the Minister has told the House is at variance with the facts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members have various views about speeches, but each hon. Member is responsible for his own speech.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is falling lamentably below his usual quite high standards of debate.

Two of the contracts that have been let will save £1 million a year. The Hammersmith contract, to which the hon. Member for Islington, North referred, will save between £500,000 and £600,000 a year. Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that he would wish that money to be taken away from patients and spent on unnecessary costs? That is a ludicrous argument; it is an anti-NHS argument. It may be a pro-NUPE argument, but it is not a pro-patient argument.

The NHS has obviously been running some parts of its services inefficiently. It must examine critically the way in which it provides services and they must be provided at a high standard.

The hon. Member for Islington, North alleged that a substantial number of problems had occurred in private contracts. Because the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has interrupted me with fatuous points of order, I have only two or three minutes in which to deal with the matters raised by the hon. Member for Islington, North.

The comments of the hon. Member for Islington, North about the Barking hospital dispute are scandalous. He said that what has been going on at the hospital is dangerous. He should substantiate that allegation or withdraw it. Even the trade unions have stopped picketing the hospital. The only people there now are representatives of a fatuous local organisation called Health Emergency, which is funded by Mr. Ken Livingstone and the GLC.

In recent days, the hospital has suffered vandalism and a series of break-ins. Hospital lavatories have been blocked and staff have been put to extreme inconvenience. None of that is in the interests of patients. It is in the interests only of the hon. Member for Islington, North and his extremist colleagues.

Mr. Corbyn: No facts, only a smear.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member for Islington, North ought to reflect about what the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said about him in the debate on Northern Ireland last night. How right the hon. Gentleman was in what he said about the behaviour of the hon. Member for Islington, North in recent weeks in encouraging terrorism.

I believe that we should look at the overall benefits that our policy will bring, the savings that will be achieved, the improvements in local services for NHS patients and the improvements in the efficiency of NHS management that will flow from that policy. I find it difficult to see any arguments against that cause and I shall be surprised and disappointed if the Opposition wish to deny the public such benefits, either for doctrinaire reasons or because of their associations with trade union interest groups that support the hon. Member for Islington, North.

British Expatriates

10.15 am

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am grateful for the opportunity of raising the important subject of the treatment of British expatriates working abroad, particularly in Nigeria and Libya.

I propose to raise a number of individual cases which are significant, but the subject is of general importance, because the growth of international trade that we hope to see will mean that there will be more expatriates working overseas. The protection of their rights and assets will remain a matter of the greatest concern to us and the responsiblity of the Foreign Office.

I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, is to reply to the debate. I congratulate him on holding his office with such great distinction. I recall that many years ago I was one of a group of 15 people being interviewed. One of us was to be chosen and the process involved a long group discussion to which we all contributed. Many brash, excitable, enthusiastic young voices rushed into the discussion, eager to put forward their views.

My hon. Friend made no contribution until about two thirds of the way through the discussion when, in three sentences, he demonstrated that he had grasped the subject and seen the flaws in the arguments of others and put forward a carefully thought out, constructive approach of his own. He was chosen and his career has not looked back since. I have every reason to suppose that this debate will follow the same pattern and I look forward to the pearls of wisdom that my hon. Friend will utter.

Many thousands of British expatriates work abroad, many for foreign-owned companies, many for British companies and some for multinational companies, which often receive a bad press, but are an important link in the economic chain that binds the developing and developed worlds to each other. Some expatriates work for Governments or governmental agencies.

It would be surprising and regrettable if, as international trade grows, the number of expatriates working abroad did not increase. I believe that the number will increase. I pay tribute to the energy and enterprise of those people who do work that is of the greatest service not only to the British economy, but to the economies of the developing world.

Newly independent countries of the Third world are often sensitive about expatriates and are not uniformly welcoming. Some, like Nigeria, are the beneficiaries of immense natural resources. However meandering the present economic path of Nigeria may seem to us, its resources will be developed and exploited, with help from outside. Naturally, I hope that the help that Nigeria receives will continue to come from people in this country.

All countries of the Third world wish and need to develop their own economies. They look first for the most basic resource, which is food. In the end, aid must gradually give way to trade, and most of those countries want assistance in developing their agriculture. I recall the Christian Aid advertisement of some years ago

"Give a man a fish and you give him lunch for today; give him a fishing rod and you give him lunch for his life."

Those of us who were burdened with a classical education recall our astonishment to find that once upon a time the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates was fertile. Once upon a time Sicily was the corn centre of the civilised European world. Parts of Africa that are now desert or bush produced food. Undoubtedly there are large parts of the developing world where, with irrigation and the necessary agricultural skills, deserts could be made to bloom.

I believe that it will be increasingly the role of Western industrial countries to provide the necessary management, advice and services to make that happen. The work of the United Nations agencies alone is quite insufficient for that purpose. Whether aid is given bilaterally or multilaterally, project work must continue to expand, just as trading contacts must do. More expatriates working in Third world countries will result, however those developments take place.

I am not advocating or prophesying a revival of colonialism. Twenty-six years ago I served in what was then Tanganyika, preparing for independence under the guiding hand of the United Kingdom. I pointed out then that it would be in the interests of Tanganyikans for the connection between that country, Britain and the EEC to remain close. Sadly, the progress of that country since then has illustrated how much the skills and resources necessary to develop Tanzania's agriculture are lacking in that depressed economy.

It is essential that Third world countries recognise that the development of trade and aid will involve the work of expatriates, and that that is very much a two-way process. Just as expatriates must respect the laws of the host country and must adapt to local conditions, so the host country, too, must see that the basic rights of individuals are not infringed. The host country has an interest in protecting such individuals, whether they are buying, selling, constructing or maintaining. Expatriates from western industrial countries will play an increasingly important part in the development of the economies of Third world countries if the aspirations of their citizens are to be fulfilled.

On the other hand, the Foreign Office has a direct responsibility for expatriates and must be robust in protecting their interests, seeing that they are well briefed and provided with all necessary assistance. The Foreign Office today is at last adjusting to the changed relationships between developing and developed countries, and is recognising that trade is a vital part of the business of the Foreign Office. Undoubtedly some embassies and high commissions recognise that more, and provide a better service for expatriates than do others.

I have corresponded with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and his colleague, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on this subject, and now wish to mention two cases, in particular, with which I have been concerned. The first case is that of Mr. and Mrs. Strong of Shaftesbury in my constituency. Mr. Strong worked in Nigeria from 1978 until early 1982, and for the last year and a half for a Nigerian company, Lopin Ltd., which withheld his pay for six months without grounds for doing so. Mr. and Mrs. Strong suffered severe harassment, were threatened at gunpoint by the company's security guard, and lost furniture and belongings as well as a good deal of money and their passports in the process. Mr. and Mrs. Strong fully recognise that the British Government cannot be responsible for privately contracted agreements, but the efficacy of the legal processes in countries such as Nigeria

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is not as great as it is in Britain. It is, therefore, even more necessary for high commissions or embassies in such countries to take an active and vigorous interest in protecting the interests of British people working there.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State is aware of the details of that case, so I shall not go into further detail now. But my constituents felt—and I agree with them—that the high commission seemed to have given some indifferent advice and had certainly failed to pursue matters on their behalf with the sort of zeal and energy that they are entitled to expect. As a result of my investigation of the case of Mr. and Mrs. Strong, it became apparent that there are many other expatriates who have worked in Nigeria and who are having difficulties in securing payment of their salaries and moneys owed from their time working there.

There is now an organisation called Unpaid Personnel Nigeria, which is actively assisting its members to obtain payment of moneys they are owed. I have been in contact with the company Expatriates International Limited, which runs a magazine and provides services to expatriates. About 7,000 members of that organisation are assisted by it in avoiding some of the worst pitfalls that are to be found by those seeking work for foreign employer companies. The organisation has encouraged those owed money to submit claims to a London bank before the IMF was prepared to lend Nigeria further money. That is certainly one way of trying to secure the payment of moneys that are owed.

It has to be recognised that in the context of Nigeria companies employing expatriates can often use the protection of their Government or of those in authority there to avoid the payment of moneys that are due. That is why this is a matter with which the British Government should be concerned. My hon. Friend the Minister of State and his colleague Baroness Young have been helpful in looking into the facts of this, and other such Nigerian cases generally. But in my view there comes a point at which Government-to-Government pressure has to be applied. I should like to see that pressure applied, and I urge my hon. Friend to take up all such matters with the Nigerian Government. I hope that he will put the repayment of moneys to expatriates on the table in any bilateral negotiations, and will also raise this issue at the EEC level.

I also wish to raise the case of my constituent, Malcolm Pike of Blandford, whose experience in Libya is altogether different, but illustrates again the need for vigilance on the part of our Foreign Office in protecting British people working abroad. Mr. Malcolm Pike had worked in Libya for a company called Lomond Engineering between August 1980 and June 1982, but was unable to secure employment thereafter on his return to Britain. He therefore accepted an offer of work from Lomond Engineering again, and went to Libya in June 1983, following that company's nationalisation.

Mr. Pike's task was to assist in finalising the claim for compensation with the National Petroleum Services Company of Libya and to assist in dealing with the tax office in view of his previous experience with the company and knowledge of its affairs. It subsequently appeared that the company had substantial tax liabilities and the only other employees of the company left Libya, leaving Mr. Pike to continue his work. The two executives in the company to whom he was reporting became impossible to contact, and despite various assurances Mr. Pike has been left in Libya without pay and is owed a substantial sum of unpaid salary and expenses. He is not allowed to leave the country as, under Libyan law, he can be held hostage for the unpaid tax of his employer company. Mr. Pike is now subsisting on the generosity of friends, without money or work. Despite the admirable efforts of the British Government's representative in Libya, Mr. George Anderson, he is in effect being detained there.

It must be clear by now to the Libyan authorities that the employer lacks resources, and is abundantly clear that Mr. Pike has no funds himself. My constituent faces a bleak Christmas. His case should be an awful warning to anyone contemplating work for such a company in a country that has such an oppressive law enabling it to hold tax hostages. I know that my constituent's parents will, like me, much appreciate all efforts that my hon. Friend can exert to secure the release of that young man in Libyan limbo.

I have drawn these two cases to my hon. Friend's attention because of the important work available for British expatriates to carry out in developing countries and because of the need to ensure that they are encouraged to do so rather than deterred by the unfortunate circumstances of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Strong and Mr. Malcolm Pike.

My hon. Friend will have my full support in strong measures to convince the Governments of the foreign countries concerned, however delicate relations may be, that the duty and determination of the British Government are to ensure that British citizens are protected and their rights safeguarded.

My message is that British expatriates working abroad do an invaluable job, but are entitled to expect the support and positive assistance of the Government. I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend has to say.

10.32 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Renton): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) for raising this important subject on an Adjournment debate. He recalled that many years ago, he and I were together on a selection interview committee. I think the seat involved was Sheffield, Park division—which, despite its salubrious name, was described in the local paper as being a roll-call for all the council houses and tower blocks in Sheffield. It was an extremely safe seat for Labour, which was duly won, again in the forthcoming general election, by the present Lord Mulley. Since then, my hon. Friend has gone on to what might be described as the greener pastures of Dorset, and I to the greener pastures of Sussex. Perhaps we have both benefited from the experience of appearing before the selection interview committee.

My hon. Friend quoted from his classical knowledge to remind us of the days when some of the countries of northern Africa which are now threatened by drought and famine were the corn belt of the then civilised world. As he said, while it may be hard for deserts to bloom again, there is no doubt that one of the great challenges to trade and aid working together in the years ahead will be that of tackling the increasing problem of drought, over-population and too many animals, that lead to the severe famine that we are now seeing in Ethiopia and Sudan.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, there is a role for expatriates from western countries to help in that process. He referred to the number of expatriates and the important task that they carry out. I wholeheartedly endorse his words. Many expatriates work for British companies. They assist not only the countries where they are based but help Britain to regain trade that we may have lost and to bid for important new contracts that would be of great benefit to our manufacturers.

The size of the problem is mirrored in the number of expatriates. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office believe that there are between 5 million and 6 million. While for many of them the work that they do is very important to this country, they must accept that they must abide by the laws and regulations of their host countries. At times, they must adapt their own living styles to comply with local customs.

My hon. Friend called for vigilance from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but I am sure that he will endorse my belief that those going to work abroad must themselves be vigilant in considering the living conditions and the laws of the countries where they want to work, and accepting that they will not be the same as those in the United Kingdom

It is worth repeating that living in other countries is not the same as living in Britain. Expatriate workers must make judgments based on many factors. They will no doubt receive high and, in many cases, tax-free salaries as an inducement. They often have good living conditions. But they must remember other factors such as local customs, security conditions and the fact that the drinking of alcohol may be banned, all of which will make their lives different. It is not possible for Britain to tell other countries what their laws should be, any more than we expect other countries to tell us what our laws should be.

Britain has had exchange control regulations in the past. We might — God forbid — under a Labour Government have such regulations again. Britain has managed to get rid of them but other countries have not. That has a bearing on the flow of salaries and pensions from other countries to workers who have returned to the United Kingdom, and I shall mention more about that in relation to Nigeria. We cannot automatically expect other countries to follow suit when we make a change for the better. It is worth remembering that the laws of countries change because of a change of Government, and they sometimes deprive expatriates of rights that they expected when they went to work in those countries.

Our consulates department is open every day of the year, other than Christmas day, to advise people who are intending to travel. It is important that would-be expatriate workers find out as much as possible about the country that they intend to visit. We shall do all that we properly can to protect them. To assist with advice before expatriates travel, my Department, in conjunction with the Central Office of Information, has produced a leaflet entitled

"Get it right before you go"

with the subtitle

"What the British consulate can do for you, what the British consulate cannot do for you and what you should do for yourself".

I am pleased to say that last week, on behalf of my Department, I accepted a plain English award for the leaflet——

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Hear, hear.

Mr. Renton: I am glad to have the approbation of my hon. Friend.

The first print of the leaflet—700,000—has already been used and we intend to have an even larger reprint next year. This graphic leaflet spells out the role of the consul. It makes it clear that consuls abroad are not lawyers, doctors or nannies. They are there to advise and help those who are in difficulties. Their role especially is to advise those who are in difficulties on how to get good local professional help. Their job is to offer helpful and realistic advice, which may at times be unpalatable. I strongly suggest to hon. Members that they suggest to their constituents who are considering working abroad that they read the leaflet or get in touch with the consular department before they go.

We are conscious that more Britons are working abroad as well as travelling abroad for their holidays. This means that the volume of work for our consular staff is increasing. We are confident that the staff is working well. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office keeps staffing levels under constant review so that, in spite of cuts in a few places, temporary or permanent staff reinforcements are sent out as necessary. I have already referred to the 5 million expatriates who are working abroad. In addition, 25 million Britons go abroad on holiday. My hon. Friend will realise the burden of the workload that falls on the 292 diplomatic service officers abroad who are involved in full-time consular work along with another 170 locally engaged staff. Thus, a total of 462 are involved solely in consular work. That has to be measured against the 5 million expatriates and the 25 million who go abroad on holiday. It is correct that all our ambassadors and high commissioners are actively interested in consular work. It is against that background that we give strong advice to those going to live or work abroad to find out about local conditions in advance. That must be said in the light of the volume of work that comes over the desks of our consular officials.

I recognise the strong merit of my hon. Friend's remarks and I turn to the two places that he has mentioned. First, I direct myself to the difficult case of Mr. and Mrs. Strong and the sad experience that they had with Mr. Strong's employer in Nigeria. As my hon. Friend probably knows, there are 11,000 British citizens who remain in Nigeria; many more have returned to the United Kingdom. I fully understand from the details that my hon. Friend has given why he felt that he should become involved in the case.

Mr. and Mrs. Strong's difficulties in Nigeria were first brought to our attention in London in April 1983, more than a year after they had left Nigeria. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentland (Mr. Rifkind), Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has had lengthy correspondence with my hon. Friend. I refer especially to his letters of 29 December 1983 and 9 February 1984. By and large, the high commissioner could not intervene in what was a private contractoral dispute for settlement through legal channels. It would be useful if my hon. Friend were to remind Mr. and Mrs. Strong that when it comes to fair treatment for Britons employed by Nigerian companies, contracts of employment between British citizens and Nigerian companies are essentially private matters between employee and employer. Her Majesty's Government have no standing to intervene when things go wrong.

[Mr. Renton]

Our high commissioner in Nigeria, as elsewhere, is willing to give advice and formulae should a dispute arise but if, as in Mr. and Mrs. Strong's case, an amicable settlement cannot be reached, the employee has to seek legal advice and pursue his complaint through his own legal channels. Mr. and Mrs. Strong's case is a private matter and we have no standing to negotiate a code of practice with the Nigerian Government for employment in the private sector. Equally, we would not expect the Nigerian Government to try to negotiate a similar code of employment for Nigerians working in Britain.

I turn from the particular to the general and to my hon. Friend's point about the problem and delay in obtaining remittances of salaries, pensions or other payments that are due from Nigeria. He will realise that the difficulties are caused by the shortage of foreign exchange in Nigeria and the prolonged recession combined with Nigerian bureaucratic confusion and delay. Her Majesty's Government have no legal standing in individual cases but my hon. Friend has asked for Government-to-Government pressure to be brought. I can assure him that that is the sort of pressure that we have been trying to bring to bear. We have tackled the problem on several occasions, including approaches at ministerial level, and we have received assurances that financial commitments will be met and that remittances will eventually come through, although the delays may be lengthy.

One member of the high commission in Lagos is employed virtually full time in taking action with the central bank to expedite remittance applications when progress in individual cases appears to have stopped. This has helped to achieve a successful outcome in many cases, including some where delay in receiving payment is causing especial hardship. However, the only long-term solution to the problem is an improvement in Nigeria's economy. We shall continue to work with the Nigerian Government and in consultation with the International Monetary Fund towards this end.

I am glad that, earlier in the year, Mr. and Mrs. Strong finally received their passports from Nigeria. I know that the return of their passports was due in no small measure to the hard work of my hon. Friend in pressing for that to happen.

I turn from the problems of Mr. and Mrs. Strong in Nigeria to those of Mr. Malcolm Pike, who is in Libya. This is a very difficult case. My hon. Friend will know that there are about 5,000 British citizens living and working in Libya. We have had no diplomatic relations with Libya in the past months. Relations were severed after the tragic murder of Policewoman Fletcher in April and the subsequent Libyan embassy seige. The Italian embassy in Tripoli has been our main channel of communication since then with the Libyan authorities. We are generally confident that, thanks to their help and our own British interests section in Tripoli, which is staffed by two diplomatic service officers, we are able to do everything possible to protect the interests of British citizens who remain working in Libya.

We first heard of Mr. Pike's case in June. Mr. Pike is an accountant and he has been held responsible by the Libyan authorities for the debts of the company for which he works, which is Lomond Engineering. He is not in prison but the Libyans have been holding his passport. Mr. Pike's solicitors in London are also pursuing the matter with the London office of Lomond Engineering. My hon. Friend referred to Mr. George Anderson, who was our consul in Tripoli. His place has been taken in recent weeks by Mr. Hugh Dunnachie. Mr. Dunnachie has been in frequent touch with Mr. Pike. I understand that their last meeting was about 10 days ago. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that our consul believes that Mr. Pike's difficulties are gradually being resolved.

I have just been passed a note saying that Mr. Pike has now been able to leave Libya by arranging to allow a deputy to substitute for a while. Doubtless, that will be of great help to Mr. Pike and it will be specially welcome news with the Christmas holiday just ahead.

Mr. Pike is involved in a commercial dispute in which, for the reasons I have stated, it is not proper for the Government to intervene. Her Majesty's consul on the spot is giving Mr. Pike all the assistance he can properly give.

I have spoken about these two individual cases and the inevitable volume of work that comes to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office generally and to the consular section in particular in dealing with the large number of expatriates working abroad and Britons going on holiday abroad. I remind the House that the consular section of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is open every day, save Christmas. Those on the staff do their utmost to give sound advice to the Britons about to leave Britain to work or for a holiday. I believe that it would be in the Christmas spirit if the whole House were to use this opportunity to send its good wishes and thanks to all our diplomatic officers who are serving overseas during this holiday period, whether in embassies, high commissions or consulates, for the difficult task they do and the manner in which they perform that task with limited resources.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I certainly join in the Christmas wish my hon. Friend has expressed to all our diplomatic staff. I thank him for his reply about Mr. Malcolm Pike. On other occasions, an arrangement of a substitute to take his place has been in train and has not taken place. My hon. Friend's news is welcome, and I hope that it will result in my constituent being able to join his parents for Christmas. Will my hon. Friend encourage Mr. Hugh Dunnachie to continue the kind assistance he is obviously giving? I shall be completely happy with the conclusion only when my constituent is able to leave Libya and return home.

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks. Mr. Dunnachie is the consul who recently took Mr. Anderson's place in Tripoli. I fully understand my hon. Friend's comments, and I have no doubt that Mr. Dunnachie will pursue the course my hon. Friend has requested.

I shall end in the spirit of Christmas and goodwill—I hope the House will not mind this — and quote a message sent on 12 October 1984 to the high commission in Lagos. In part, it reads:

> "I am writing to thank you and your consular staff for all support, help and advice that was so freely given over the past two weeks. That they were able to complete so much in settling affairs was due in no small part to the active and willing involvement of your consular staff."

It is always nice to end a debate with a bouquet, and I am sure that the whole House will be pleased to know that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office regularly receives such bouquets.

City and Hackney District Health Authority

10.53 am

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I am delighted to be able to participate in this Adjournment debate. It is the Friday before Christmas, and I am looking forward to going to Venice; so one is more emollient in this debate than one might otherwise be.

I raise an important issue, because, to put it mildly, these have been unhappy times for the City and Hackney district health authority. Only just over a year ago there was a riot at a meeting of the authority. On that occasion, I had to escort the authority chairman out in order to protect him. That involved me in sharp political criticism. However, I am glad that we got him out of the meeting in good order.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Louis Freedman, who has just retired as chairman of the City and Hackney health authority—I think I could call him a high Tory and a millionaire racehorse owner—expressed some unhappiness about the Department of Health and Social Security. He thought that decisions had been taken too quickly and that the authority had not been allowed to adapt to new circumstances. I would put it more strongly and say that the closure of the hospital is creating great discomfort and unhappiness in Hackney.

Mr. Freedman has gone, and Mr. Evan Stone has taken his place. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State will be pleased to note that I do not intend attacking Mr. Stone. I should have preferred Mr. Donald Hoodless, whom I and the community health authority recommended to the post, but Mr. Stone is in office and he must be judged on his performance and not condemned before he starts.

As it happens, neither Mr. Stone nor Mr. Hoodless came from Hackney or the City. I believe that they both came from Islington. It is worrying that there are fewer local people on the City and Hackney district health authority than on any other health authority. I may be wrong, but I should be surprised to hear otherwise. Well under half of its members live either in the City or in Hackney.

We talk a great deal about devolving powers to the people, taking power from central Government and local people knowing what is best for them. I believe that that is right. I am not sure why Hackney has been picked out for preferment. Why is it that, of all the areas in Britain, it is in the City and Hackney that there are thought to be insufficient decent people able to conduct the affairs of their own health authority? That cannot be right, and it is time that Ministers started to shift the balance.

One of the reasons for this action concerns the conduct of some members on the authority and the events that followed the occupation of St. Leonard's hospital. Following the Minister's announcement of the effective closure of St. Leonard's hospital, an occupation occurred in the summer. Following that occupation, disciplinary action was taken against Miss Andrea Campbell and Mr. Geoffrey Craig. Miss Campbell was a shop steward for the Confederation of Health Service Employees and Mr. Craig was a shop steward for the National Union of Public Employees. They were dismissed as a result of that disciplinary hearing, and they then appealed. I did not give evidence at the original hearing, but I did so at the appeal on behalf of both those people. I believe that, when selecting members of a district health authority, one must select members who not only can carry out the administration properly, fairly and justly, but can carry out tribunal hearings properly, fairly and justly.

I have been puzzled about the reasons why disciplinary proceedings were taken against those two people. Thousands of people in Hackney were involved in the occupation. I went to the hospital both during and following the occupation. I spoke to members of NUPE and to nurses sitting on the wall outside waiting for vehicles to take them home. I spoke at meetings composed of hundreds of workers, most of whom worked at that hospital. They all supported the occupation. One might say that the occupation was right or that it was wrong. One might say that it was responsible or that it was irresponsible. It is extraordinary to note that, of all the workers who supported the occupation, only two were picked out to be the subject of disciplinary hearings.

I have tried to find out from Mr. John Dennis, the district administrator, why he acted in that way. Is it that he wants war and not peace? Does he think that adopting a hard line will help him to be the general manager of the authority? If society is to act fairly—I speak as a barrister—one cannot arbitrarily pick out two people from the hundreds involved in a particular industrial dispute and say, "We will subject you to condign criticism, we will punish you publicly; we will make you scapegoats; we will set an example; we will show the public that we are not prepared to tolerate this by picking out two individuals."

In addition to the workers who started the occupation, there were thousands of members of the public. What is more important, if I can catch the Minister's ear for a few moments—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I apologise. I was consulting my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for the Environment.

Mr. Sedgemore: I am glad that the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health and Social Security liaise. It does not always happen but perhaps a change for the better is coming.

It is also noteworthy that at least one third of the members of the district health authority supported the occupation, and, rightly or wrongly, that the two local Members of Parliament supported it.

As I said at the appeal hearing, the district health authority might have liked to try the two Members of Parliament and the one third of its own members, and it might have liked to take disciplinary proceedings against members of the public. Given that all these people with all these different roles in public and private life were involved in that occupation, how could one take those two individuals and say, "It is just you two whom we are bringing before this tribunal."

The first tribunal which dealt with Miss Andrea Campbell's case upheld her appeal and said that it would remove the dismissal notices and that she would be given a warning.

When I gave evidence to the tribunal, I found that it was relaxed, friendly and courteous. As I was giving evidence, I did not know what decision it would reach. The tribunal seemed to be conducted properly. When I gave evidence

[Mr. Sedgemore]

to the tribunal which dealt with Mr. Geoffrey Craig, it was rather different. To put it mildly, it was cold, abrupt and unfriendly. The tribunal consisted of Sir Robin Brooks, who was in the chair, Mr. D. Joines, a former treasurer of the authority, and a Miss B. M. Bartram, who is a nursing officer. I did not find their conduct satisfactory, which is why I am raising this matter, because I am not sure that the three of them should be members of the district health authority. If they are about to retire, I hope that their membership will not be renewed.

I do not want to be unkind to Sir Robin. I suppose that one way to describe him is to say that he is a dinosaur living in the wrong age; another would be to say that he is the sarcophagus of a philosophical theory that has perhaps seen its day. I detect from his conduct of the tribunal and his general conduct at the meetings of the district health authority that he appears to be motivated by political ideology, if not by spite.

I am unhappy about the way in which that tribunal was conducted. I am unhappy that one of the members of the district health authority, Ms. Lucy De Groot, gave evidence, but was not allowed to make a statement. After she had been asked some questions, she asked whether she could make a statement at the end of her evidence. That is a normal practice at a tribunal, as I know from my experience at the Bar. She was abruptly and discourteously told that she could not make that statement.

I have also spoken to Miss Dorothy Hardman, who conducted the case on behalf of Mr. Geoffrey Craig. She was treated in an unfriendly and discourteous manner. When tribunal hearings are being conducted, and when there is such sensitivity and public opinion has been outraged—there have been many difficulties over the past years—these things should be done differently.

I was also disturbed by the manner in which I was questioned at the second tribunal, not because I cannot handle it—good Lord, I used to go into the courts every day of the week—but by the way in which Mr. Joines seemed to be injecting prejudice into his questions. That is all right for a defence barrister in a criminal case where there might be a question of life or death or of someone getting three or five years' imprisonment, but in an orthodox tribunal hearing interested in the possible dismissal of an employee, people should not ask questions, all of which are leading, and seem to inject the prejudice of the questioner. What that and the whole atmosphere suggested was that the people on the tribunal had made up their minds before they had heard the evidence. That appeared to be borne out by the fact that, having heard the evidence over a number of days, the tribunal retired for about five minutes and reached an extraordinarily quick decision. It seems inconceivable that it could during that time have weighed up and balanced the evidence given at that hearing.

We should ask whether the three people involved in the hearing are fit to run tribunals. We should question whether they should now be on the district health authority. I have talked to many people and many MPs involved with the Health Service and they say that the City and Hackney district health authority has a reputation for being hopelessly out of date with its industrial relations. I do not know the history of that because I am fairly new to the area. I hope that the Minister is prepared to appoint more younger and more local people to that district health authority so that we can have a new start. If the Minister can tell me that——

Mr. John Patten: On a point of clarification, the Department does not appoint members to district health authorities; they are appointed by the regional health authority. The ministerial appointment to the district health authority is that of the chairman. The hon. Gentleman's remarks might best be addressed to the chairman of the regional health authority rather than to me.

Mr. Sedgemore: I am grateful to the Minister for that information. We all know the way that these political processes work. The region should be appointing, with the Minister's encouragement, more younger and more local people to the district health authority.

If when he replies the Minister can assure us that he will encourage such appointments, we can all go home for Christmas even happier and I can have an even more pleasant time in Venice than I would otherwise have.

11.5 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I hope that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) has an agreeable and enjoyable time in that most beautiful of cities. I must apologise to the hon. Gentleman for appearing momentarily not to be paying his speech the closest attention. I was in consultation with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) whom I am happy to see on the Front Bench. He was telling me that in an earlier manifestation as one of my predecessors in the Department, he had answered a similar debate from another hon. Member from the area. My hon. Friend has a distinguished career in answering Adjournment debates. Indeed, today, 21 December 1984, will see my hon. Friend breaking his ton and answering his 100th Adjournment debate.

There are a number of things for which I must thank the hon. Gentleman. I join in the thanks of Mr. Freedman, for his actions during that unruly health authority meeting — which it is best to draw a veil over and to forget— for helping to protect him. The hon. Gentleman's considerable size and stature and his expertise, no doubt acquired during his distinguished rugby-playing career, must have helped a great deal when he protected Mr. Louis Freedman during the problems that were facing him during that lamentable series of occurrences.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and myself are all deeply indebted to Mr. Freedman for the work that he did as chairman of the health authority. We wish his successor, Mr. Stone, a distinguished Queen's counsel, good fortune in what he does as chairman of the authority in the future.

I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's views about Mr. Hoodless. He is a man with an exceptional record and, because he has that exceptional record, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently renewed his appointment as a member of the regional health authority, where he has done such good work for such a long time. I know Mr. Hoodless and I greatly respect what he has done for both housing and health over the years. I hope that people will continue to give public service in the selfless way that he has during his career thus far.

When my right hon. Friend selects people to serve as chairmen of regional health authorities, as members of regional health authorities and chairmen of district health authorities, he invariably seeks, on the advice of officials, colleagues and people who know the community to appoint those people whom he believes will do the job best. I am convinced that the regional health authority that appoints members to the district health authority does exactly the same with regard to the City and Hackney district health authority.

I was looking at the list of members, and without wishing to read it out or go through their high personal qualities, the authority is lucky to have such a strong membership. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's views of Sir Robin Brook. We have complete confidence in the work of members of district health authorities such as Sir Robin and nominees of, for example, the TUC, such as Ms. de Groot. We are very lucky to have such people to help us to carry out Government policy, reflect the interests and demands of local people and help to mould health care in the City and Hackney area.

The hon. Gentleman made two real points. One concerned his feeling that the balance of the district health authority membership was not quite right, and that there were not enough young people on it. One often hears such a complaint about public bodies. Sometimes it is hard to find younger people to take up the job, which is understandable, because of the careers that they are following, they are just married, have mortgages to pay and all the other problems that make people say, "No, I shall not do a job at 30 or 40 that I shall be content to do at 50 or 60." It is a pity, but it is understandable. I shall draw the contents of the hon. Gentleman's speech to the attention of the chairman of the regional health authority. I shall send him a copy of *Hansard* so that he can read what the hon. Gentleman said and in future years, with his authority and membership panel, take the hon. Gentleman's feelings into account because I know that the hon. Gentleman does his best to reflect the feelings of those whom he represents.

The hon. Gentleman's second point, which was substantial, concerned his fears about the conduct of a tribunal that led to disciplinary action in a couple of cases. I know that he is motivated by the interests of the individuals and of making sure that natural justice was observed and they were treated properly. His own distinguished legal career suits him well for that purpose.

However, it would be inappropriate and probably highly improper of me to comment in any way on the details of the case raised by the hon. Gentleman because it is entirely a matter for the health authorities concerned. In a sense, the issue is also sub judice as regards his constituent and those authorities. Under standard Whitley council procedures agreed between employer and employee, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has no locus whatsoever in the case. I should like to explain that.

I was interested to see the facts when, through the assiduity of one of the characteristically alert civil servants whom we employ in the Department of Health and Social Security, I was warned that this topic was likely to be the one that my hon. Friend would raise. I am sorry, I meant the hon. Gentleman. I must not carry the Christmas spirit too far.

Each district health authority has procedures for dealing with disciplinary matters concerning its employees. They are set out in the authority's terms and conditions of service for its staff. They are based on the nationally agreed procedures set out in the Whitley council handbook, that voluminous and detailed tome. A district health authority's terms and conditions of service set out the full procedures for disciplinary matters — from warnings, either oral or written, through suspension to dismissal. In cases where the action leads finally to dismissal there is provision — as there is for written reprimand or warning — for appeal to the health authority. The procedure for such appeals is in turn set out in the authority's standing orders. All district health authorities up and down the land have that procedure written into their standing orders.

If an appeal to the authority is unsuccessful, the matter does not end there. The employee can seek redress elsewhere if he or she wishes. There is provision under section 40 of the general Whitley council handbook — which might be interesting Christmas reading for the hon. Gentleman in Venice — for an employee of a district health authority who has exhausted its procedures to seek an appeal to the appropriate regional health authority. Whether an appeal is granted is not a matter for Ministers but is entirely at the discretion of the regional health authority. The decision is for it. It has the responsibility for deciding whether there are grounds for an appeal. If the regional health authority decides that there are no grounds for such an appeal or if an appeal is heard and turned down, there is no provision for appeal beyond the regional health authority. Neither the Department of Health and Social Security nor Ministers, including the Secretary of State and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health, have any locus in the matter.

That is the sequence of events under National Health Service procedures. For completeness, I should also mention, although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is also aware of this, that an employee who feels that he has been unfairly dismissed can appeal to an industrial tribunal for it to review his case. The employee has to apply within three months of the date of dismissal.

Those are the procedures for disciplinary action and dismissal of district health authority employees. As I have explained, the Secretary of State, because of the very nature of an agreement between employer and employee and not for any other reason, is not involved at any stage. It would therefore be totally inappropriate for me to comment on the events described by the hon. Gentleman or, indeed, to respond to his specific questions. In this case, it would be doubly inappropriate because I understand that that case is in a sense sub judice. I am advised that the hon. Gentleman's constituent has appealed against his dismissal, as is his right, and City and Hackney health authority heard his appeal at three hearings on 12 and 19 November and 4 December, and that its recommendation went to the full authority for ratification or otherwise only last Monday, 17 December. When the appellant is notified of the result, he will need to consider what his next steps, if any, will be. I have tried to outline, in the hope of being as helpful as I can, what the next stages might be.

The hon. Gentleman said that the dismissal of his constituent was a draconian punishment. He criticised the members of the authority who heard the appeal, one of them quite forcibly. If the appeal is upheld by the full authority—I do not know what the result is—no doubt he will criticise it as well. He is, of course, entitled to his

[Mr. John Patten]

opinions on those matters, but this morning I cannot and must not comment on them because they are not issues that concern Ministers. That is not because we do not care about the fate of individuals who work in the NHS but because it would be totally wrong for Ministers to seek to intervene and vary procedures that have been set down through agreements that have been freely entered into between employer and employee. That is not what I would seek to do. I am sure that criticism would rain down on our heads if we sought to do so at any stage. In this particular case, we must await the outcome of events.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to mention this matter before the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security leaves.

The House is in some difficulty. An important decision was made yesterday on the Gillick case about advice on contraception to girls under the age of 16. Naturally, one thought that there would be a statement to the House this morning. Late last night question 162 for written answer on this subject was tabled, and obviously there will be an answer in *Hansard* when we return on 9 January. I wonder whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, could consult Mr. Speaker to see whether there is any way in which the House can be protected in such a case, when on the last day before a recess something of national importance occurs. The Minister for Health will have either to accept or to reject the idea of altering legislation. Naturally our constituents, especially general practitioners, will be concerned—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not pursue the argument. It is not a matter for me. The Minister is here, and there are several other important matters about which the House would like to be informed.

Mr. John Patten: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government do not control the sitting patterns of the courts, which take their decisions on days that suit them. The decision happened to be taken yesterday by the court. Further, the matter is still within the courts as my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health has announced his intention to appeal to the House of Lords against the decision.

Mr. Pavitt: I am most grateful.

Drinking and Driving

11.19 am

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): First, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish you and all my parliamentary colleagues a very happy Christmas. This debate on drinking and driving very much concerns the festive season. Christmas is a joyous time for everyone, but drinking and driving is a sombre topic. Every year some 1,200 people die as a result of road traffic accidents in which drink is a contributory factor. In 1983, 109 pedestrians were killed and 1,077 injured by vehicles driven by people who failed the breath test. It may be of interest to note, too, that one third of car drivers and motor cyclists who are killed have more than the prescribed limit of alcohol in their blood. On Friday and Saturday nights, between 10 pm and 4 am, the proportion rises to a dramatic two thirds.

There must be a responsible reaction to the problem. Many people in the licensed trade are as concerned as I am, but the public at large is desperately short of facts and information. We must make a concentrated effort to inform people of the effects of alcohol, the penalties for drunk driving, the relationship of various drinks to blood alcohol levels, and so on. Some members of the licensed trade have been extremely helpful. The Wine and Spirit Association recently produced a 15-minute videotape entitled "Alcohol Abuse — What Must Be Done". A copy has been placed in the Library. It acknowledges that it does not give answers but merely poses the questions, but it is an ideal introduction for discussion purposes, especially among young people in youth clubs and so on.

The Brewers Society has produced three road safety films to make young people aware of the dangers of drinking and driving and on 18 December it launched a nationwide campaign under the title,

"Don't gamble with your licence"

and much material has been produced in connection with that. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is to answer the debate. As we have come to expect each year, the Department of Transport has launched its own campaign. That, too, is greatly to be welcomed.

It is important to deal with some of the myths about drinking. For example, spirits are not invariably more dangerous than beer or wine. A product called "double gin and tonic" in 175 ml bottles can be drunk straight from the bottle but the strength of 11·4 per cent. is no greater than table wine. Spirits diluted in that way may be considerably less strong than some sherries. When mixed with tonic and the like, spirits are not nearly as strong as many people think. The key to any valid campaign to ensure a reduction in the tragic waste of human life through drinking and driving must be the principle of moderation. The aureum mediocritatem or golden mean of the Roman poet Horace is indeed a good guide to us all in this as in every aspect of life.

Alcohol in moderation can be beneficial. People who drink in moderation—under 20 units per week for men and 13 units per week for women—are likely to live longer and suffer fewer heart attacks than teetotallers. I am sorry to hear that teetotallers have been singled out as likely to suffer more, but that is substantiated by medical evidence. That, too, is part of the dilemma. Although in many cases alcohol can be beneficial, if taken to excess it can, like most other things, be positively harmful and dramatically dangerous not just to those who consume it

but, more importantly, to innocent bystanders caught up in the tragic results of drinking and driving. I should explain at this point that one unit of alcohol is roughly equivalent to a single whisky, one glass of wine or half a pint of ordinary beer or cider.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the Government campaign, which has been described as the "Stay Low" campaign. Although there has been much controversey about the campaign and the title has unfortunately been misleading, there is a beneficial aspect in that the campaign has been far more widely debated than it otherwise might have been. I hope that my hon. Friend will make it clear again today that to be fully safe people must not drink at all when they drive. In fairness to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I will read the press release in its entirety, as that is indeed the message that comes across. It reads as follows:

"Don't drink any alcohol at all if you are going to drive. That's the only way to be sure you won't be affected by drink and liable to be convicted of a drink-drive offence.

And it's the best safeguard you can give yourself that you won't be involved in an accident.

Although the 'breathalyser' law puts a limit of 35 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres on drivers' breath, you can still be prosecuted below that limit if a policeman thinks your driving ability is impaired by alcohol.

So the only way to be certain is not to drink. That's what the Department of Transport means by its advice to drivers this Christmas to stay low—very low."

Taking the press release as a whole, that is clearly the message.

People must also be made aware of the cumulative effect of alcohol. An advocate who has represented many defendents charged with drinking and driving offences has pointed out that many people do not realise that a drink at lunchtime, for example, materially affects the degree of driving impairment if the person concerned has another drink before going home, because the earlier drink may not have been fully dissipated by that time. Equally, a person who goes out on a massive drinking spree in the evening and then sleeps for six hours or more—my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I have to manage on much less to carry out our parliamentary duties—he may think that he has "slept off" the effects, whereas in fact when he gets into his car the next morning he may still be substantially over the limit and therefore driving unlawfully.

I shall not go into the subject of the somewhat controversial intoximeter designed to measure the level of alcohol, the limit being 80 mg per 100 litres of blood or 35 mcg per 100 millilitres on the breath. We know that some free pardons have already been issued to people wrongfully convicted on evidence involving the Lion intoximeter. Nevertheless, even at a level of 50 millilitres per 100 litres of blood, driving is impaired although the level of alcohol is below the legal limit. A person with that amount of alcohol in his blood is already three times more likely to have an accident than if he had taken no alcohol at all. We must do more to warn and inform.

The Government commissioned a study of alcohol policy, and the report was ready in 1979, but it has never been published in Britain. It was published in Sweden. It recommended that the Government should make a policy statement on alcohol, but that has not been done. There is a great need for information about alcohol and its effects. In 1981, Government expenditure on health education advertising about alcohol was less than 5 per cent. of what the alcohol industry spent on advertising, which was about £100 million. The Government receive in revenue, directly and through VAT, about £6,000 million a year from the sale of alcohol. It is not too much to ask them to spend more than £5 million on health education.

Yet people still do not know the consequences. In 1982, the British Crime Survey contacted more than 3,000 drivers who provided information on drinking and driving since the beginning of 1981. The alarming statistic—one of many that I could quote but with which I shall not detain the House—is that about 40 per cent. of males aged between 16 and 30 who were over the limit and, therefore, driving unlawfully believed that they would pass a breathalyser test after drinking five units of alcohol.

One way of dealing with the problem that is within the power of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is to include something in the highway code about the effects of alcohol and the consequences of disobeying the law. That has the attraction of simplicity in getting across the message, and it means that one can be satisfied that at least once in a driver's life he will have had brought to his attention the consequences of disobeying the law and the effects of alcohol, because everyone must pass an examination on the highway code as part of the driving test.

Alcohol is eliminated from the body at a rate approximately equivalent to half a pint of beer or a single measure of spirits each hour. Of course, that is not uniform. A lighter person has less water in his body than does a heavier person and will reach a higher blood-alcohol level for a given consumption. The elimination of alcohol cannot be quickened. Coffee — popularly believed to be an antidote—may keep one awake, but it does not reduce the alcohol level. Therefore, it was with great anxiety that I saw about four weeks ago the launch of a product called "Alcaway". Its advertisement describes it as

"the answer for all those occasions when a person has consumed more alcohol than he or she had intended."

Under the heading

"How much will it affect my alcohol level?"

the advertisement states:

"It depends. Perhaps 25 per cent. — or a 32 per cent. reduction. It could be as high as 45 per cent. On average about 30 per cent."

That is grossly iresponsible advertising. In view of what I have said about the inability to reduce the blood alcohol level, the advertisement could be extremely misleading.

Is there any validity in those claims? That was considered by Mr. John Teller, the director of Avon Council on Alcoholism in Bristol. He noted that it had been claimed recently in the press that blood alcohol levels can fall by as much as 77 per cent. in 30 minutes. He contacted Mr. Peter Bate of the company Five Swallows in Stansted, Essex, which is marketing that product in Britain. Mr. Bate sent to Mr. Teller the research upon which the claims were based. He sent him five documents, two of which were copies of published research carried out in South Africa in 1983—Alcaway is produced in South Africa — and in Australia in 1982. The two studies involved only 19 white males. Mr. Bate also sent two typewritten sheets describing the effects of Alcaway on blood alcohol levels. That study involved only 12 subjects. There were no controls. In that document we find the magic figure of a 77 per cent. reduction, although not in 30 minutes.

[Mr. Keith Best]

What worries Mr. Teller and what worries me is, first, that no tests were carried out on women. Secondly, increasing the rate at which alcohol is broken down by the body can cause poorer judgment, such as in driving. Thirdly, fructose, on which Alcaway is based—it is an apple-flavoured drink—can cause painful side effects. Fourthly, Mr. Bate does not know of any side effects. Fifthly, Mr. Bate expects to sell 400,000 cans of Alcaway before Christmas, and about 4 million cans next year. Finally, it is naive in the extreme to assume that people will not use Alcaway—the name leaves little to the imagination—in the belief that it will then be safe to drive after drinking. No guidance, advice or warnings have been issued to retailers or customers. The company hopes to market the drink next year in the United States of America under the brand name "Arrive Alive".

In fairness to Mr. Bate, I should say that he is reported as having said that, in his judgment, people should not drink and drive. But it is naive to believe that people will not be misled by the product.

As a result of my anxiety, I put down several questions about this—one to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport and another to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services. I asked whether there was a policy about marketing products designed to reduce blood alcohol levels, and I received this reply from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State:

"If a product were marketed explicitly for the purpose of interfering with the normal operation of a physiological function, it would probably require a licence under the Medicines Act. If any such product appeared on the market consideration would be given to enforcing the requirements of the Act."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *71*.]

I am glad to know that the Department is now considering the product carefully to see whether it should come under the Medicines Act.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State replied in this way:

"The rate at which alcohol is absorbed into the blood stream is affected by a variety of factors. While some products can slow down this process, I am not aware of any evidence which suggests that the elimination of alcohol from the body can be significantly speeded up. My general policy is to warn drivers of the risks involved in driving after drinking under any circumstances."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *46*.]

There seems to be no doubt in the mind of my hon. Friend and her Department that no substance can artificially reduce blood alcohol levels. I hope that that message will go from the House to the general public, and also a message about the side effects that could be caused by a fructose-based drink.

I have written to the Advertising Standards Authority about this matter. I said in my letter:

"Although fructose does, in some instances, accelerate liver function the consequences of this can themselves induce drowsiness and inability to concentrate and in view of this the claims made for the product appear to be unsubstantiated. The statement 'research has proved beyond doubt' is derived from two small studies in South Africa when less than 20 people were tested. No structured or creditable scientific experiments can be discovered."

Not only the group of which I have the privilege to be chairman—the all-party parliamentary alcohol policy and services group—but the drinks industry expresses considerable reservations about the way in which the product is being marketed. The implication that it might be safe to drive after using Alcaway is especially disturbing. It is simply not true. As the final paragraph of the advertisement says,

"Only you will know how well it works."

No one will know that until he or she breathes into an intoximeter, and by then it may be too late.

The reply that I received from the Advertising Standards Authority on 20 November of this year was that this is being pursued as a matter or urgency.

I believe that the trade is concern about the marketing of this drug. In the *Morning Advertiser* of 21 November, under "Viewpoint", it was noted that concern was being expressed about the claims made for it. From the time that the breathalyser was introduced products have been launched at intervals making claims that they are antidotes to alcohol. The attitude of the trade has been made clear from the start. It will have nothing to do with such products. The trade has adopted the same attitude towards the various do-it-yourself breathalyser kits that have been marketed. Their comment is that they can only repeat the advice that has been given to licensees in the past and that they are reasonably sure that brewers take the same attitude—that is, to leave well alone.

There is the additional danger that immediate allegations will be made that licensees are only out to get customers to drink as much as possible without thought for the social consequences. By putting such products on the market for sale they would be putting themselves in danger of fierce criticism from several directions.

While accepting my congratulations on the campaign which the Government have launched, I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will realise that this is not the end of the story. There is much more that the Government can do and which I expect the Government to do in the form of information and helping to explain to people the problems of drinking and driving and its effects. I have made one or two suggestions which I hope the Under-Secretary will look at carefully. Ultimately we need to change attitudes. We need to ensure that there is moral condemnation of the concept of drinking and driving. This matter is as much in the hands of the public as it is in the hands of the Government. However, the Government can take a lead on information and education. I shall be satisfied if the result of the debate is that more people are alive and uninjured after the festive season than might otherwise have been the case. If so, this will have been a worthwhile debate.

11.42 am

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North): I am well aware that my hon. Friend the Minister of State who is to reply to the debate wishes to do so fully. In those circumstances, my speech will be shorter than I had intended it to be. At the moment we are in the midst of the normal Christmas campaign. On this occasion it is a controversial campaign, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) that the very controversy may have drawn people's attention to the campaign. We should always remember that driving with an excess of alcohol in the blood is a continuing problem. It does not happen only at Christmas, although people may be well aware of the risks that they run and may be more careful at Christmas.

We have been given today the figures relating to accidents throughout the year. As many as two thirds of those who are involved in fatal accidents have too much

alcohol in their blood. The level of alcohol in their blood is above the permitted limit. This year Derbyshire does not intend to have a special drive over the Christmas period. Last year, however, 935 people were stopped in Derbyshire and tested and were found to be negative. They were driving within the limit; only 53 positive results were found.

Once the figures are as far apart as that, one is getting virtually to random testing. I am not against random stopping and testing, but I believe that the time has come when we must make up our minds about where we stand on random testing. Car checks occur regularly on a random basis. Breathalysers are often used at the same time. The use of radar is random; it is not known that a radar check is round the corner. When a motorist is stopped, the breathalyser may be used. In this country, therefore, there is random testing and we must make up our minds about whether random tests should continue and stealthily increase. My view is that it would be better to acknowledge that random testing is taking place and that we should allow the police to stop anybody whenever they wish and test them if they wish. It is a continuing problem on our roads. It may lead to political difficulties. In the past we have made promises that this would not happen. However, every time anybody who has had a drink takes a car on to the road it becomes a lottery. Therefore, the Government would be well advised to take their courage in their hands and say that they will allow the police to stop anybody whenever they wish.

11.45 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for agreeing to my brief participation in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend upon the timeliness of the debate and I endorse all that he has said. In the interests of saving time I shall not reiterate any of his remarks, apart from stressing that anything that can be done to reduce the carnage on our roads, in particular at Christmas, is to be welcomed.

I declare a double interest in taking part in the debate. First, I am the parliamentary adviser to the National Union of Licensed Victuallers. Secondly, I am one of the only two licence holders in this place. The purpose of my intervention is to acknowledge what the licensed trade, both the licensees and the brewers, are doing to promote responsibility among pubgoers regarding drinking and driving. This week has seen the launch of a national campaign entitled "Don't gamble with your licence". I see that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is holding a copy of a poster which, she will notice, is drink and drip-proof. I have in my hand a drip-mat. It is an example of 15 million such mats that are being distributed throughout the country. The number of posters that are to be sent out is 100,000.

I welcome also the involvement in the campaign of some of the police authorities. Sussex is one. I am sure that there are others. Both the police and the licensed trade have a joint interest in promoting safety on our roads at Christmas.

May I also draw the attention of the House to two other measures that are being undertaken by the trade. First, the trade is stepping up its promotion of low content alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks. I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn has said about dubious products that make extreme claims about their safety in relation to alcohol content and ability to counter alcohol. This does nothing but bring the trade into disrepute. Advertising claims for such products must be backed by clinical evidence, or those who are involved in the manufacturing and marketing of such products are taking part in an activity that borders on the criminal.

Secondly, may I draw the attention of the Minister of State to the fact that public transport is being organised over the festive season by brewers and local licensed victuallers associations? One example is the Phoenix brewery in Brighton. This is very welcome. It may be continued throughout the year. It is unfortunate that in some areas public scheduled bus services stop running at 10.30 pm. At Christmas and the new year, with so many pub extensions, this presents considerable difficulties for those who want to get home without having to drive their own cars.

I should be grateful if the Minister could acknowledge what the licensed trade is doing. Will she also look into the problems presented by the proliferation of off-licence outlets for alcohol? We have seen a growth in the number of supermarkets that now sell alcoholic drinks, often with completely inadequate supervision of the age of those who purchase drinks. I am horrified to hear—I have yet to find the concrete evidence—that some garages are now selling alcoholic drinks in their off-licences. As we prohibit the sale of alcohol on motorways, some guidance must be given to magistrates to ensure that on no account should off-licences be granted to garages.

Let me conclude by quoting a statement made by Mr. Danny Trevelyan, the president of the NULV, when launching the "Don't gamble with your licence" campaign this week. He said:

> "Celebrating Christmas and New Year in a pub is a tradition in itself but drivers who exceed the limit are risking their licences, their livelihoods and sometimes their lives and the lives of other people. Licensees will welcome this opportunity to warn drivers to think before they drink before they drive."

I am sure that the House will join me in applauding that statement and the campaign that it introduced.

11.51 am

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) on having this most timely debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Miscampbell) who have participated. They do the House, and indeed the country through the media, a service in continuing to remind us of the potential fatality that any driver who is foolish enough to drink and drive or get on a motorcycle may cause, not just for himself and his passengers, but for anybody else who may be on the road or even on the pathway beside the road.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn is right to say that we need more education on the dangers of drinking and driving. In due course my Department is planning to give even wider information than has already been given out in the facts leaflet on drinking and driving from the road research laboratory because it needs to be much more widely available and influential.

Like my hon. Friend, I am worried by much of what he described this morning and I shall be taking up what he said with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

Health. The new 1981 legislation, which became effective in 1983, gave us procedures for dealing with high risk drink-driving offenders, but the problem of what alcohol does to one's perceptions needs to be taken forward in a rather different way in future.

My Department is reviewing the highway code, as it does from time to time and I shall see what entry in that might be useful in persuading people to do the sensible thing. Unfortunately, although the highway code is full of sensible advice, once people have taken their first driving test it is usually only those who go on to advanced training who look at it again. The fact that there are three copies of the highway code in my flat is something to do with the fact that I am always telling people what is in it. If only people would go back to it after they had passed their tests, a little more common sense might be produced on our roads.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North was right to remind us that drinking and driving is not just a problem at Christmas but a fatal combination at any time. Of course, we see a higher consumption of alcohol around this time of year, but the incidence of drinking and driving is not appreciably higher at Christmas than at other times of the year. I hope that it is the publicity, and indeed the debate that we have had about this year's campaign—just as we had a rather smaller debate about last year's campaign—which makes people aware just how stupid it is to drink and drive.

When Christmas and the new year are over, with, we hope, fewer fatalities, injuries and accidents than in previous years, we still cannot let the matter drop until 12 months hence. The threat posed by a drinking driver at any time of the day, night or year must be taken account of in our policies. However, successive Governments, including this one, have taken the view that a particular lead should be given at Christmas to bring home the appalling risks. There are two reasons for that. Inevitably, there is anxiety that if no action were taken people might begin to forget the alarming numbers of people who drink more than is probably wise for them over the festive season. Secondly, a continuous programme of major publicity throughout the year would not be as effective.

The present campaign documents, such as the facts on drinking and driving published by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, and also the reminders which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside gave us in the campaign that the brewing industry has launched this year, all help to make sure that we see more responsible attitudes and behaviour now and throughout the year.

For 10 years a substantial proportion of my Department's publicity budget has been dedicated to Christmas advertising to prevent drinking and driving. I am grateful too, for the parallel efforts made by some local authorities and many police forces. I echo the welcome that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside gave to those organisations and companies which are helping to provide a safe get-you-home service with somebody else doing the driving, whether it be local car hire firms or the new year's eve free travel on London Regional Transport which is being provided by one brewery this year.

It is impossible to gauge the effects of campaigns; that my hon. Friends know that was clear from the way that they approached this debate. We must try to see whether our campaigns are getting through to the people on whom we have to make a positive impact. Surveys suggest that advertising has played a part in increasing general public awareness about drinking and driving. It is more encouraging that over the period that we have had such campaigns alcohol consumption and the volume of motorway traffic has been rising, but the incidence of drinking and driving appear to have at least remained fairly steady, and may even have dropped slightly.

We know, because of the problems that we face on road safety—so depressingly familiar and rather intractable some of the time—that there is a great need for a stimulus of fresh and innovative thinking if we are to have any chance of getting to grips with the problem successfully. We must present our message in a forceful and arresting way. The last thing that would be right would be for the campaign against drinking and driving to become just part of the traditional background to the festive season.

It is not enough just to go through the motions of condemning drinking and driving and to leave it at that. As my hon. Friend the member for Ynys Môn said, we must be ready to search for new approaches which persuade people to think afresh about what drinking and driving involves, to be conscious that they should never put the two together and to alter their behaviour accordingly.

The campaign strategy has been debatable, but as my hon. Friend said, we have had much more media coverage, and I hope that that in itself will this year save lives that would not otherwise have been saved. We are aiming this year's campaign particularly at young people who are at the beginning of their driving careers and—I do not want to call it a drinking career—but at least their experience of alcohol.

Young people face particular risks. They are inexperienced as drivers, even if they think that they are great on the road. They have not the experience of alcohol that older people have. They may not readily appreciate how easily alcohol can impair performance at the wheel or on a bike. The attitudes of young people are still at a formative stage. Therefore, there is a good chance that responsible habits developed at that stage will stay with them in later life. With that same aim in view, more attention is now being given to drinking and driving as an issue in traffic education in our schools.

We all know that the young are not an easy audience to reach. We carry out research in preparing all our campaigns. Research demonstrates that the response of young people to a message depends very much on its presentation to them. Every piece of evidence indicates that to adopt a heavy-handed, authoritarian approach produces an immediate switch-off. If we wish to communicate effectively, we must ensure that we do not switch people off. We must be conscious about the kind of message and the tone of voice to which young people will respond. That is why the whole thrust of the campaign this year has been to bring home the truly awful human consequences that can follow from drinking and driving. Commercials and posters put that message over in no uncertain terms.

I cannot accept for a moment—and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn takes the same view—the criticism that the campaign lacks punch. One needs only to take a good look at posters such as "Too

Much Punch For Judy," "Christmas For Carol" or "Stephen on the Terrace" to see that the criticism is untrue. As I stand at the Dispatch Box today, I go cold when I remember what is involved for a family who perhaps lose someone or have a disastrously injured person among them for the rest of their lives—perhaps an innocent victim of someone else's thoughtless drinking and then driving.

There can be no doubt about the message at the heart of the campaign. It is, "Don't drink and drive". That is what we have always said. I have said it this year on every occasion when I have been given the opportunity, and I shall go on saying it. The campaign gives no comfort to anyone who is tempted to run a stupid risk — or to gamble, as the Brewers Society advertisement says, with drinking and driving.

Why, then, does the message this year stop short of the explicit statement that people must drink absolutely nothing when they are driving? I will give the House two reasons. First, the law does not involve a complete prohibition on alcohol for drivers. The law says that they must not be over the limit, nor must their driving be impaired, whether they are under or over the limit. It is important that what we say in our campaign is consistent with what the law says. Indeed, there has been criticism in the past that our advertising appeared to extend the law by administrative edict.

Secondly, the stark injunction never to drink and drive is just the sort of message that turns off the target audience of younger people to whom I referred. They dismiss it, and then they do not listen and take further note of the message. So the campaigns are designed to produce a response. If we do not get a response, whether it be for a target group or for others, we know that we have to do something different.

People must not be misled by concentrating only on the caption "Stay Low". The campaign as a whole must be looked at. The overwhelming majority of the people in the 16 to 19 age group in the pre-campaign research thought that the symbol, the slogan and the message meant either "Don't drink" or "Don't drink and drive". That proves that the message has gone through to them.

I hope that the current campaign, which is one of the most powerful we have ever had—and the debate about it will ensure that over this festive season—and, with luck, beyond—the message goes home. My own contact with young people shows that the campaign is having an effect. I understand that Stevie Wonder has produced a record called, "Don't Drive Drunk". That should reach many young people. In all those ways, the message for which my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn asked is being brought home.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North went a little further than my other two hon. Friends. He told the House how certain police forces have conducted their campaign in trying to ensure greater safety on the roads at Christmas time. Those campaigns involve the breathalyser. I remind him that there was a new Transport Act in 1981, and that some of the measures were brought into force only in 1983. This is only the second Christmas period when the new penalties have applied —a maximum fine of £2,000, up to six months in goal, and the minimum of a year's suspension of a driving licence.

While we must watch exactly what each police force is doing, we must also watch exactly what the public are doing. We must know whether they are taking the message. I think it is right to wait for at least two years before asking whether there should be any change in the way that we operate the law. We are nearly at the end of those two years.

We do not have random testing in Britain but if anything appears to be wrong with a vehicle on the road it is liable to be stopped. Any police officer who smelled alcohol on a driver's breath would be failing in his duty if he did not then ask the driver to take a breathalyser test.

The debate is valuable for us all. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside mentioned not only the get-you-home services but the fact that some garages seem to have off licences for the sale of alcohol. If such a development is taking place, I view it with considerable alarm. I know that the Home Office will also want to look at it. I think that many of us are concerned that alcohol is becoming available through various new outlets.

With regard to Alcoway and any other potential so-called alcohol remover that might be marketed, I do not know in detail about the product that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn mentioned. I am glad that he has referred the advertising of the product to the Advertising Standards Committee. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and I shall need to look with some care at any products, marketed in whatever way, which could perhaps mislead the public into thinking that they could get protection by using them.

I shall continue to look for new ways of improving education and awareness still further, and of winning the battle against unnecessary damage to life and limb, let alone to vehicles. There is only one safe way to drive on the roads, not just at Christmas time or the new year but throughout the year. My message to people is, "If you are going to drink at Christmas, by all means have a good time, but do not then get on your motor bike or into your car. Go home safely by public transport, or by letting someone drive who does not take alcohol. If you cannot get to your destination by either of those means, use your own feet." There is a good song:

"These boots were made for walking".

I remind people that their feet were also made for walking. If people have been celebrating at Christmas—which I hope everyone will enjoy—I beg them to have a care for others on the roads and not only for their own families. I ask people to make sure that they do not drink and drive.

Information Technology Industry

12.9 pm

Mr Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I applied for this debate because I believed that there were important problems in our information technology industry which should be brought to the attention of the House before we went away for the Christmas recess.

The information technology industry is vitally important for Britain. It is one of the few areas in which we can see economic growth and job creation, with the opportunity to improve people's living standards.

The Government are presiding over an industry that is in serious trouble and that the recent NEDO report described as being in crisis. In 1983, the industry had a deficit in our balance of trade approaching £1 billion, and that deficit is growing rapidly. Although the industry is growing and appears on the face of it to be reasonably healthy, it is only when we make international comparisons that we see that there is a very wide technological gap between Britain and Japan, the United States of America, France and Germany. This is very important for Britain.

The Government are displaying indifference to science and technology, and the recently announced moratorium on the Government's support for innovation scheme means that they are incredibly complacent about the future. This support is vital because many areas of advanced technology such as the microelectronics support programme are being deprived of the funds that they need.

Even more recently, during one of the most embarrassing climb-downs by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, the Government backed away at expenditure on science and technology because of the pressure from the House not to increase parental contributions to student fees. The upshot is that the Government are cutting their planned expenditure on equipment grants by £6 million, the Science Council will lose £3 million, and a range of other schemes, including the microelectronics programme, will lose about £2 million.

There is no doubt that the Government are fumbling. Their inconsistent and fragmented policies are accentuating the technological gap between Britain and its main competitors. The Government are showing themselves to be hypocritical towards the information technology industry. They use fine words, but they are very light on action to save the industry.

The consequence of this is that our indigenous information technology industry is dying before it has had a chance to blossom. I am convinced that many people are not aware of the seriousness of this. We are last in the technological race with our major competitors, and that means that the opportunity to create jobs, to stimulate the economy and to improve our standard of living is likely to be lost for ever if we continue the way that we are going.

The Alvey project is one of the major sources of Government support to the industry, and this has to be welcomed. However, I understand that the companies receiving grants under the project must be British or have a strong British base. What policy has the Minister to ensure that this Government's money being spent on these advanced projects will be exploited by industries in Britain? If I may put it another way, how will the Minister ensure that the multinationals, which are so strong in the microelectronics and information technology industry, do not exploit this research facility for the benefit of other countries' jobs and economic growth?

It has been suggested to me by a number of people in the industry that we would need to spend about 10 times the sum going to the Alvey programme to convert projects into commercial products that could be sold worldwide. If that is true, is the Minister confident that the estimated £3·5 billion needed to back up the Alvey programme will be forthcoming? Finally, is the £350 million currently being spent on it sufficient? When we compare it with what our international competitors are doing, I have serious doubts.

It is important that any Government initiative in information technology should be followed up. I refer especially to the Department of Industry's pilot project for "Office of the Future", which it initiated three or four years ago. How many of these innovative projects that his Department has supported have been replicated in other places in addition to the sites in which the trials were conducted?

The Minister will probably say that if there is some follow-up to be done, it should be done by industry, and that is a fair argument. However, I believe that the Government can create the market for these pilot schemes and advance research projects by having the right kind of procurement policy to support our home industries and British companies. The Government have control over the public sector, and that is a huge IT market. What plans has the Minister for introducing a procurement policy to support especially the new small and medium-sized businesses that are attempting to survive and grow in this fast growing but very competitive industry?

The NEDO report, "Crisis in the IT Industry", also highlighted the manpower shortages in the industry. This is a major factor inhibiting growth. I feel that the Government have made ghastly mistakes in their policy on training and education, and I have to refer to the ludicrous cuts made in the budgets of our universities. Clearly these will have an affect on education and training, and this at a time when there is a shortfall in skilled people in the industry. The Government's attack on the universities will result in our not having the people whom we want. Imposing cuts on technological universities such as Salford and Aston does not make any sense.

As a result of the Government's investigation into skill shortages, they are recommending a new initiative between industry and the colleges of higher education to set up new institutes. Bearing in mind the urgent need for skilled staff, why do not the Government use our existing universities? Will the Minister also say whether there are yet any firm commitments from industry to support these new institutions? Will he also say when fully trained students can be expected to emerge from these new institutions? What other initiatives will the Government be taking in the meantime to solve the crisis?

There is no doubt that our information technology industry faces serious international problems. The recent NEDO report said that the deficit of trade last year was over £800 million, and it has been suggested that that figure is on the low side. Will the Minister give us the exact trade deficit for 1983?

Our failure to keep up with our competitors means that our share of the aggregate market served by Japan, United States, France, West Germany and Britain has fallen from

9 per cent. in 1970 to 5 per cent. To put it another way, our share of the output of the five major countries in the IT business has tumbled by 50 per cent. since 1970.

Is the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is to reply to the debate, worried about our rapidly accelerating trade deficit? About 50 per cent. of our home market is satisfied by imports. In contrast, imports account for only about 10 per cent. of Japan's home market and the comparable figure for the United States is 6 per cent.

The NEDO report suggested that unless urgent steps were taken to rectify the problems, our indigenous industry would die. Will the Government take urgent action to save that industry or will they allow existing trends to continue? What will they do, and when?

In October, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) tabled a parliamentary question asking what action the Government proposed to take in response to the NEDO report. The Minister for Information Technology said that over the past five years there had been a significant shift in the Government resources devoted to IT. He said that the Government were not complacent about the problems created by international competition and that they shared NEDO's objective of creating a climate in which the United Kingdom industry will be able to increase its international competitiveness. The Minister said that the Government would continue to pursue that objective vigorously. How does the Under-Secretary square that statement with the moratorium on spending on the support for innovation scheme?

Mr. Eric Hammond, the general secretary of the EETPU and chairman of the electronic components economic development committee, wrote in a report to the National Economic Development Council on 5 December:

"My EDC has charged me to tell you that the moratorium has chilled the heart of the industry. The long term plans of companies will be held up while Government contemplates. This is especially damaging to the smaller and more innovative companies, but even the larger ones will be hurt because of disruption to their programmes."

Mr. Hammond said that at a time when the Government should be encouraging companies to expand they were giving them the "sweet and sour treatment". This year, the Government had increased spending on microelectronics, but had effectively neutralised that increase by withdrawing the 100 per cent. first-year capital allowances and by announcing the moratorium on applications under their principal microelectronics programme.

Mr. Hammond added:

"In the financial years 1981-84, Government support (excluding Regional Development Grants) totalled more than £2 billion to the steel industry and almost £650 million to shipbuilding, but only £126 million for the whole of microelectronics. It is time for the Government to finance the future as least as much as it subsidises the past."

I am inclined to agree with Mr. Hammond's statements. It is certainly questionable whether the support for innovation funding, which was £61·3 million in 1979-80 and is now only £155 million, at 1979-80 prices, is enough. It can reasonably be argued that because of the immense growth in the industry we should be matching that with our expenditure on support programmes.

The Government were wrong to impose the moratorium on the industry at this time. There is no doubt that the Government will reap the consequences of their inept decision.

The rapidly widening gap between, particularly, the information technology industries in Japan and Britain can be partly accounted for by the amount that we spend on research and development on defence. The proportion of our research and development budget allocated to defence is considerably higher than the proportion spent on defence in France, the United States, Japan and West Germany.

For example, the United Kingdom spends about 53 per cent. of its research and development budget on defence, compared with the 2 or 3 per cent. spent by Japan. That must be the reason why Japan is so strong in the civil IT sector. Surely the time has come for the Government to take early action to divert to civil information technology some of the massive resources spent on military research and development. What specific plans do the Government have for reallocating part of the massive research and development expenditure on defence?

I am very worried about the decline in the number of jobs in our IT industry. The steady decline over the past 10 years has been due partly to our industry's poor performance and particularly to the level of imports, which represented 54 per cent. of our market last year and are still growing.

Does the Under-Secretary realise that if we continue in this way, our IT industry will comprise merely a set of branch sales offices of the large multinational corporations? When will the Government start to provide the environment in which this vital industry can thrive and move out of the crisis that the Government have helped to create? The time has come for action, and I hope that the Government realise that if they continue with their current policies of slashing science and technology our indigenous information technology industry will be lost for ever.

12.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) for giving us an opportunity to debate the very topical issues that he has raised concerning the future of the British information technology industry. I am sure that he will agree that it is impossible to define the industry exactly. It is not just an electronics, software or computer industry. It now takes in a whole range of disciplines and activities whose effect on the economy is all-pervasive; hence our mutual concern to see that British skills and capabilities are enhanced, and indeed dramatically improved.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the industry must be seen in the context of its general effect on economic growth and job creation. We must also consider whether there is a crisis and, if so, to what extent it should be a preoccupation of Government and others. There is no question of sweet and sour treatment for the information technology industry in the United Kingdom. We are most definitely not indifferent to the industry's prospects. We not only have fine words—as the hon. Gentleman put it—but our actions, too, have been very concrete. It was this Administration in the preceding Parliament who introduced the concept of a Minister for Information Technology. Indeed, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the contribution made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) in driving forward information technology policy. We were unique in having such a Minister, and virtually still are. The former Minister for Information Technology introduced new budgets and objectives and took forward a significant number of new policies. Those policies still ride forward.

[Mr. John Butcher]

In that context, I shall deal with the moratorium. Expenditure under the heading of "Support for Innovation" for the financial year 1983-84 was approximately £190 million, which meant an increase from a fairly low base in 1979. That is a spectacular growth in spending under the SFI head of account. In the current financial year, projected expenditure across the generic heading, "Support for Innovation" is £230 million. Applications for funding have been subject to a moratorium purely because awareness of the various schemes available arrived like an express train both last year and this. For the first time we found ourselves spending up to the limits of our budgeted amounts in very short order.

Thus, whereas there had been a slight underspend on that head of account prior to 1983-84, we find that the work we have done on awareness has paid such dividends that—to put it a little more positively—the Department of Trade and Industry is now a victim of its own success.

Mr. Randall: If there is a demand for those funds—which I am delighted to hear about—why have not the Government responded by increasing the amount available to that crucial industry?

Mr. Butcher: That is precisely the sort of question with which the Department is now grappling. The hon. Gentleman will know that there are broader considerations involving, not least, how we rejig our spending within our budgets next year. They are generally considerations that affect my colleagues in other Departments, which may be reporting to the House in due course. But, like my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I shall not be tempted this week into trying to give some idea of the profile of spending within my Department in the coming financial year. Thus, I am sorry, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the detailed response that he may require. It is not that we are hung up on monetarism, but that we are anxious to continue to build on the achievements of the past three or four years. However, we wish to do so in a cost effective way that is relevant to the requirements of this important industry. I shall deal later with the Alvey programme, and also with the very important question of skill shortages, which concerns not only my Department but the Department of Education and Science, the Manpower Services Commission and all those who consistently look after the interests of the supply side of the economy.

With regard to skill shortages, we are anxious to ensure that our universities participate fully in what we now call the "new partnership" between industry and the higher education sector, including both polytechnics and universities. We are also anxious to ensure that no one is written out of participation in what we hope will be a very dramatic exercise during the coming years. I shall be delighted to report progress on the IT skills agency that the CBI is setting up under the auspices of its education foundation.

The Government are concerned about the deficit in IT trade. The information technology industry underpins so many other commercial and industrial issues. The Government attach great importance to the success of the industry and have placed a high priority on seeing it prosper. As a nation we are not alone in doing this, of course, for it is the fastest growing sector of economies throughout the world. And it is not just because the IT industry itself benefits the nation through its growth, but so, too, do the rest of our manufacturing and service industries as they take up IT products and so improve their own performance, viability and profitability. No modern, industrialised nation can afford to ignore the health of its IT industry. It is central to achieving a more general internationally competitive position for the United Kingdom.

That is why five years ago we embarked upon such an energetic programme of change aimed at raising the profile of the industry and getting over to all sections of our community the message that IT matters. Nobody surely can deny the spectacular success of that campaign. At all levels—school, office, home, shop and factory floor—there is now a readiness, even an eagerness, to find new ways of doing things using the products and services of the IT industry. That change will transform this country in time, especially as our youngsters subsequently turn their easy familiarity with IT to advantage in the working environment. Not only has our micros-in-schools programme provided us with this springboard for the future, it has given us an international lead in educational hardware and software on which to capitalise in overseas markets.

As I said earlier, the success of our awareness programme has made this country one of the most receptive in the world to the application of IT. For an example, we need only to look at the take-up of home computers. In an area of burgeoning demand, it is significant that we now have three or four British-based companies manufacturing products to satisfy that demand. Most of these companies are looking hard at exploiting the export opportunities that come from the dynamic home base.

However, our balance in IT has worsened, and now that we have achieved many of our major objectives in awareness we are correctly turning our attention to supply, and the contribution to be made by British-manufactured hardware and British-developed software.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that, in contrast to the picture presented in the NEDO information technology economic development committee report, the deficit could be as high as £2·3 billion. The obvious difficulty in arriving at reliable estimates of the balance of payments position for IT is in deciding what elements of the industry to include in the definition of IT. The picture varies depending on what categories are included, using a definition that embraces the hardware elements of IT, but not the software. I regret that figures are still difficult to come by. We estimate the deficit to be £2·1 billion for 1983. It is clear that on that basis the position has deteriorated during the past five years.

That suggests that the British IT industry has a major task ahead of it to retain international competitiveness, and the Government are not complacent about the level of overseas competition that our industry faces. But it is a mistake to adopt too pessimistic a view. There is a real and beneficial effect on the efficiency and competitiveness of our manufacturing and service sectors arising from this increased application. Concentration on balance of payments alone may be too narrow and, although we are concerned about it, we should also recognise the increase in efficiency within our economy generally through raised awareness and application of the products.

We have a policy of seeking inward investment, which is bringing significant benefits to the British economy in

terms of technology transfer and international competitiveness. Inward investment projects such as Hewlett Packard at Bristol and IBM in Scotland will help to reduce the deficit as they meet United Kingdom orders and begin to export.

We must see the industry in an international perspective. Research and development expenditure by American industry or electronics and IT for 1983 was $8 billion. In the same year NEC and Fujitsu alone spent over $1 billion. The rate of growth in R and D expenditure projected for American and Japanese industries suggest that the Japanese figures will double in less than five years and the American figures in about eight years.

With a smaller home market and a lower turnover, a country of the size of the United Kingdom cannot match this effort alone, which is why we have attached a high priority to Europe, both as a market for our products and as a partner with whom to share the burden of research and development expenditures.

The Government's support for innovation in IT has been substantial. About £570 million has been spent since 1979. That compares favourably with support from other Governments. The recent IT economic development committee report on the industry rightly acknowledged the Government's contribution, especially that of my Department. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman skipped so lightly over this massive contribution. I recognise that it is the duty of the Opposition to oppose, to probe and to check for weaknesses, but I feel that the hon. Gentleman was less than generous in his acknowledgement of the Government's contribution, which has been £570 million of extremely cost-effective expenditure.

Perhaps one of the most significant events is the bringing forward of the Alvey programme. The hon. Gentleman referred to that, and the difficulties that British industry may experience in finding the finance to convert the output of the programme into commercially exploitable products. We are delighted that the Alvey directorate has established itself so quickly and effectively. Indeed, the speed with which progress has been made has surpassed our expectations. The first annual report of the Alvey programme, of which a copy will be placed shortly in the Library, shows that 300 research proposals have been made, of which about 100 have received technical approval. Over 50 companies, 43 academic institutions and five research establishments are involved in these projects. For example, under the computer-aided design for the VLSI programme, the Alvey directorate announced on 14 December approval of the first eight projects. These collaborative projects involve 15 companies, six universities and two Government laboratories and will cost £13 million in total.

One obvious difficulty that is faced by the industry is having to compete from a relatively low turnover and to build large and long-term R and D programmes. The Government can help by putting in some R and D funding, but ultimately United Kingdom companies must seek their own solutions through collaboration in R and D with overseas partners — for example, ICL and Fujitsu — through mergers or by attacking world markets vigorously and thereby generating the higher growth in turnover that is needed.

Japan grew fast by attacking the large American market as well as other markets and so must our industry if it is similarly to succeed. I accept entirely that further investment will be required to turn the results of research into products. That was understood by the Alvey committee and the proposed programme takes that into account. I would like to think that the objective of bringing products to the market will be reinforced as the programme develops. I am bound to say that our industries still have a long way to go, and much hard pounding, to attempt to gain the same presence in the American market and to achieve the same presence as Japanese companies. Apparently Japanese companies are finding it a little easier to achieve and maintain a presence than British companies: we too, must bring in new marketing skills to parallel the undoubted excellence of the United Kingdom industry especially in software and, I hope, more and more in the hardware sector.

The hon. Gentleman referred to our office automation pilot programme when talking about the office of the future. Industry has recognised that this market is potentially one of the most crucial for the future and sees other countries positioning themselves to exploit it. Industry has welcomed our pilot project initiative with enthusiasm. It is seen as yet another good example of the Government's imaginative policy towards the IT industry. Whether the fruits of the initiative are turned into internationally competitive and marketable products is largely a matter for the industry. We can provide the seed corn, but the industry must make it flower. Governments cannot do that. I certainly hope that companies will act because we have a real chance to be involved.

Mr. Randall: Does the Under-Secretary of State agree that the Government can provide the market? I asked whether we could formulate a procurement policy that would help to alleviate this problem.

Mr. Butcher: We have already formulated a procurement policy which is known as the public purchasing initiative. It clearly defines what we mean by enlightened public purchasing. It applies to IT products right across the board. We say, for example, that procurement departments should be buying British products, not just because they are British but because the policy, through its working, encourage the production of British products which are best — one buys British because it becomes best through enlightened purchasing. That means closer relationships between suppliers and buyers. It means post mortems if there is a failure on the part of one supplier. It means specifying the products profiles clearly and well in advance to the potential suppliers.

We are anxious to ensure within the generality of £7 billion of Government spending on capital goods and services that the private sector is used to good effect. As for IT products, we are anxious for Government Departments and those bodies which are Government funded to buy British products whenever possible. But we cannot specify that they must be bought simply because they are British.

Although I have laboured the point about producing an enlightened purchasing policy, I believe that our line of approach is the only effective line that can be taken— otherwise we shall suffer from the phenomenon, described by the hon. Gentleman, of products which are specified as compulsory and which are not relevant in the international market. An example is our telecommunications industry where a cosy buyer and seller relationship emerged and

[Mr. Butcher]

where our international market share plummeted during that relationship. We must ensure that our companies break out of the domestic market.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West did not deal with one aspect, that of standards. If we in the United Kingdom can take the lead in establishing European and international standards, we shall be well-placed to exploit truly open international markets. No doubt, the hon. Gentleman will have noted the debate about the proposed IBM-BT joint venture. In such an issue we can legitimately ensure that there are open markets and, therefore, gain benefits for British suppliers.

As I have made clear, there is a whole tranche of policies for the IT industry. Those policies must be highly complex. It is not just a question of swinging as much purchasing power as we can into British companies. We must first reassure ourselves that those British companies are capable of reacting to a public purchasing initiative rather than being undermined by it.

Defence research and development must be at the forefront of a modern type of high technology policy. It is not only that the electronics and information technology industries are among our strongest and fastest growing. They produce computers, telecommunications equipment, electronic devices and the software that is essential for civil industry. Some of the most valuable research results of the industries is come from the defence research laboratories. The royal signals and radar establishment at Malvern, for example, did much of the materials research for the now familiar liquid crystal display. Its work on electronics, materials and high frequency devices has a world-wide reputation. My Department has helped by spending more than £5 million on research to enhance the spin-off from Malvern's defence work. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has already announced his intention further to open up the work at some of his laboratories to enable the venture capital industry to assess opportunities for civil industry. Through his policy of placing the maximum amount of work with private industry, his Ministry ensures that the work is done by those in the best position to exploit the results.

I detect that one or two of my colleagues might wish to contribute to the new subject which is about to be launched, and so I do not intend this side of Christmas at this time on a Friday to prolong the debate unduly.

I say to the hon. Gentleman, who has done the House a service by opening up the debate that, first, the Government are not complacent; secondly, we are working hard on the issues that he has legitimately raised; and, thirdly, although we are worried about the trade deficit, we see signs to make us optimistic which may not have been evident two or three years ago. We can now tackle the skill shortages and help, where help is required, with hardware and software. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bear with me to the extent that we cannot today give him the clear answer that he requires on how our future spending will be designed and allocated under the support for innovation head.

Bromley (Capital Expenditure Restraints)

12.50 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): On 18 July this year the Secretary of State for the Environment sent a letter to local authorities which was ostensibly a request to restrain their capital expenditure. In fact, the letter contained scarcely veiled threats — effectively to impose an immediate moratorium on capital expenditure of whatever character and however financed.

There followed a protracted correspondence between the leader of the council of the London borough of Bromley, Councillor Dennis Barkway, and the Department of the Environment and between me and the Department about the effect on Bromley of the moratorium, especially with regard to the use of the proceeds from the sale of assets. The Department appeared completely deaf to Bromley's case and, eventually, the stage was reached where it seemed necessary to ventilate the matter publicly and last week I applied for an Adjournment debate to do so.

Within hours of learning that I had succeeded in obtaining a debate, we heard a further announcement which was followed by a debate on Wednesday. We learnt that, far from taking into account the representations that had been made on Bromley's behalf, there was to be a further turn of the screw.

We are not talking about a council which imposes extortionate rates, which throws money about on grants to eccentric organisations or indulges in frivolous projects. The London borough of Bromley, represented in the House by my hon. Friends the Members for Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt), for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) and for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) has been a model of rectitude. It has consistently kept its expenditure within the grant-related expenditure assessment; and it has consistently kept its expenditure within targets. Bromley has always complied with Government requests. It has diligently carried out Government policies. It has sold council houses at the rate of 1,000 a year, and as a percentage of houses sold it is top of the league of the London boroughs.

Bromley has sold unwanted land; and it has rationalised its school properties by selling land and premises, and that has often involved politically unpopular decisions. A few days ago, the Audit Commission issued a report urging local authorities to study their holding of school properties. Bromley has done more than that; it has disposed of some of them.

Earlier this year Lord Belwin, on a visit to the borough, complimented Bromley on its asset sales policy. The council has used roughly 50 per cent. of the proceeds to pay off debt and 50 per cent. to improve the borough's housing stock. It has taken full advantage of the housing improvement and renovation grants scheme; it has supported many of the housing associations which do such good work in the borough; and it has also used the funds to improve schools and on projects such as the high street relief road—and all that not on borrowed money.

The result of the moratorium is that there has had to be deferment of several schemes involving school replacements and adaptions and road improvements, and especially affected have been improvement and renovation grants. Even with the moratorium, it is likely that in the

financial year 1984-85 Bromley will spend about £14 million on grants. If the present situation persists, in the next financial year Bromley will be able to spend £2 million, although there is a considerable demand for those grants, particularly for the improvement of pre-1919 houses.

A further clamp-down is proposed. We are told that some boroughs—it is not yet clear whether Bromley will qualify—may get an extra 5 per cent. allocation; in other words, an extra 5 per cent. of money that they are allowed to borrow. That would allow the building of five or six houses. Bromley would much prefer to be allowed to use its own funds to improve the thousands of properties that need such improvement.

Why has that situation arisen? Because the Government, in the shape of the Department of the Environment, although we all know that the Treasury is lurking behind it, are seeking to control all public expenditure regardless of its nature and of how it is financed. The argument centres around the magic words "public sector borrowing requirement".

How can spending money that one already has affect the PSBR? The Secretary of State says that if one sells assets, and uses the proceeds to pay off debts or make short-term loans, one is reducing the PSBR. Obviously that is right, but he goes to say that when one calls in those loans in order to spend the money that increases the PSBR.

I am not an economist, and I must say that I do not understand that argument. If it is true, it is an argument against selling assets, and we understood that the Government wanted authorities to sell assets. If one sells one's assets but, instead of loaning out the proceeds on a short-term loan, puts them in a sock under the bed until one wants the money, how does that affect the PSBR? That argument makes neither economic nor common sense. In any case, at the end of the day, the Department can still control the money that the local authority borrows.

I have referred to what Bromley does with the proceeds of the sale of those assets. It uses roughly half to pay off debts, as a result of which the borough has virtually rid itself of its rate fund debt. It uses half to finance new projects or improvement work. If the money is not immediately required for such purposes, either it is put in the bank where it earns interest or it is used for internal loans, either way helping to keep down the rates.

The argument put to us by the Secretary of State in the debate the other day was that if the councils were allowed to spend all their accumulated receipts it would immediately have a serious effect on the money markets and interest rates. That may be so if they spend the whole lot all at once, but of course they do not and would not. Any prudent and responsible council such as Bromley would spread its expenditure over a period, if only to keep within GREA.

I simply cannot see the argument for controlling capital expenditure of this character when the local authority is keeping within its target, nor can I understand why the Government are reneging on the clearly given understanding that the proceeds of the sale of council houses could be used for housing. Bromley relies heavily on capital receipts, but what incentive is there now to continue with its policy of selling assets?

This is not an unavoidable or inevitable situation. The so-called "voluntary restraint" of July and the recently announced imposition of restrictions does not have to take the form proposed, nor does it have to apply to all local authorities.

I hope that the Secretary of State will abandon these further restrictions on the use of proceeds from assets. For the reasons that I have given, it is not justified. I felt unable to support the Government in the Division on Wednesday and, if the proposals come before the House unchanged in the form of an order in the new year, I may well not confine myself to abstaining.

I offer a way out to the Government. I suggest that a clear distinction should be drawn between local authorities which co-operate with the Government and those which do not. The restrictions should not apply to local authorities which keep their expenditure within GREA and within target. That is a very simple solution. It is easily applied and requires no consultation. I can say on behalf of Bromley that if the Government were prepared to agree to that Bromley would happily forgo the 5 per cent. bonus in allocation to which it hopes it is entitled.

I do not expect the Minister to make an immediate response to that suggestion. Instead, I wish him a happy, restful and well-earned Christmas. Nevertheless, I ask him to consider carefully early in the new year the arguments that I have advanced and in particular the suggestion that a distinction should be drawn between different authorities. I trust that he will respond in a manner that will help rather than hinder local authorities such as Bromley which would much prefer to work with the Secretary of State than to be at odds with him.

1.1 pm

Mr. John Hunt (Ravensbourne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on securing this Adjournment debate and on the formidable case that he has presented on behalf of Bromley, which I certainly echo and endorse. The presence of all four Members of Parliament for the borough shows the strength of local feeling on this.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst has recounted the history of this. He has told the House how the Government's restraints on capital spending were received with shock, horror and alarm by Bromley council. The original moratorium has now been intensified by the Secretary of State's announcements this week and further dismay and distress has been caused.

I understand that when the axe first came down on 18 July no fewer than 1,000 improvement and renovation grants were in the pipeline. That gives the House some idea of the heartache caused by the present policy. Like my colleagues, I have received many sad and anxious letters from pensioners, young married couples and many other people who feel baffled and resentful at what has happened. Their grant applications were on the verge of approval but have suddenly been axed.

I beg my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the social and human consequences of what he and the Department are doing. My constituents will now have to wait a year or more to repair leaking and draughty homes and to make other improvements which, although being carried out for those people themselves, also improve the housing stock of this country.

We are baffled and bewildered at what has happened and we feel resentful about it because we are frankly not convinced by the Secretary of State's convoluted

[Mr. John Hunt]

arguments about the public sector borrowing requirement. In the debate on Wednesday my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) said:

"Local authorities have in their possession capital receipts. They could spend them on housing or whatever, without borrowing more money and without raising extra taxation. For the life of me, I cannot see the economic objection to that."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 306.]

Neither can I—and my hon. Friends are still awaiting a convincing answer to that challenge, which my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst has repeated today. As he said, in Bromley's case the resources have been accumulated largely as a result of the council's successful council house sales policy. Now Bromley is to be penalised for its success and for carrying through the policies urged upon it by the Government. There can be no logic or justice in that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst and I were preceded as Member of Parliament for Bromley in the House by Mr. Harold Macmillan, now my noble Friend the Earl of Stockton. The House will recall that his major achievement as Minister for Housing was the completion of 300,000 houses a year. At that time there was real understanding of the housing needs of our people—a sense of compassion and concern that is sadly lacking in some quarters of the Department of the Environment today. My hon. Friend said, and I know, that the real ogre in this affair is the Treasury, but my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues have acquiesced in the Treasury's demands and, to that extent, they must carry a heavy share of responsibility.

I hope that this short debate will help to convince my hon. Friend the Minister of the strength of feeling in Bromley and of the need to adopt a more flexible and sympathetic approach. I hope that he will respond to the suggestions of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst. Local authorities such as Bromley have backed the Government in every way. They deserve help, encouragement and support, not the kick in the teeth that these measures represent.

1.6 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and to the Minister for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate. I wholeheartedly support what my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst said against the Government's policy, and I look forward with him to maintaining pressure on the Government, with the possible threat that we shall be forced to withhold our support from any order that seeks to implement the policy.

Many of my constituents have been disappointed and frustrated because their pending applications for home improvement grants, to which they believe they had a right and which they believed were the subject of a binding promise, have not been allowed. The Government's decision came like a thunderbolt into local negotiations for housing improvement grants, and in many cases debts have already been incurred. There was a great physical need for the repair of some houses in my constituency which was dependent on obtaining housing improvement grants. Moreover, elsewhere in the constituency, the council has correctly and under pressure from the Government carried out a policy of selling its assets, including a large school and its grounds. The council expected that the money obtained from the sale would be of great value to my constituency as well as to the London borough of Bromley. Those expectations have been frustrated.

I deplore the Government's policy. The economic validity of their arguments is weak, and the political arguments go entirely the other way. By instituting such a policy the Government will cause dissatisfaction among their loyal supporters and will debase their promises. I implore the Government to reconsider this matter. I need not refer to previous occasions when there has been insufficient consultation with Members of Parliament, but I should say that the Government cannot continue indefinitely their cavalier treatment of local authorities in circumstances that reflect a turnround in Government policy. The London borough of Bromley deserves much from the Government, but it has been frustrated and insulted by the change of policy.

1.10 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for allowing me to intervene briefly in this important Adjournment debate. I note that home improvement grants provide a notably labour-intensive form of capital spending and also help to tackle the problem of home dilapidation. I note, too, that, thanks to wise Conservative policies, there was nationally a sixfold increase in the number of houses being repaired and improved between 1978 and 1983. As one would expect, Bromley played a notable part in that expansion.

In 1978-79, Bromley council spent just under £300,000 on home improvement grants. In 1981-82 that figure had increased threefold: Bromley was spending just under £900,000 on home improvement grants. In 1984-85 that figure has increased to £12 million and will probably reach £14 million by the end of the financial year. This rate of expansion was perhaps too great to sustain, but I regret that the Government's restrictions upon capital expenditure in Bromley will result in a cutback in the home improvement programme from £14 million to less than £2 million.

As I wrote recently in a "One Nation" pamphlet, "Jobs Ahead", on both employment and housing grounds I hope that the Government will take action so that the volume of home improvements and repairs will again increase. Since the pamphlet appeared, the Government have moved in the wrong direction both for Bromley and the construction industry. I hope that the Government will think again before they bring their capital spending plans for Bromley and other local authorities before the House in the new year, otherwise I, too, may have to think again about my support for the Government's local government policies.

1.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): Nothing is more impressive than when the united parliamentary forces of an area speak to the House on such an issue as this, which is of passionate importance to the locality involved. Every single point that my hon. Friends have made about Bromley council is right. Bromley council is one of the best run councils in the land. Its leader and his group are among the most distinguished of our Conservative supporters in local government. In many

respects they have given us stalwart support. I mention also the personal contribution of the leader to the development of policy over the abolition of the Greater London Council. There is nothing, therefore, that I would wish to argue about in what my hon. Friends have said but I must take issue with them on the fundamental choice that faced the Government.

My Department knows better than any other Department in Whitehall about the distress, difficulty, anxiety and real problems that have been caused for local councils by this policy. I personally meet, as do my right hon. Friends, delegation after delegation. At all times we are in close touch with our friends and officials in local government. We know the costs involved for them in such decisions as this. As Members of Parliament we know about the problems. I am the Member of Parliament for an inner city constituency, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State represents a constituency that is not far from Bromley. Other Ministers who are here today for other debates face exactly the same pressures and problems. We come across them in our surgeries and in letters from the worried people who have been referred to this morning.

Why then do we have to continue with the pain and grief that this particular policy creates? The only point that I want to take issue with was the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) that there were deaf ears. That is not so. The Government know exceedingly well that their policy causes pain and grief for local authorities and for their supporters in many respects. But it would be wrong for me as a Minister, and perhaps even for my hon. Friends, to suggest that hidden somewhere in the depths of Government in a lair unknown to the rest of us, is an ogre who is enforcing on spending Departments a policy of his own, nothing to do with those of the Government, with no origins in the manifesto, with no backing from Cabinet Ministers, with no backing from the House, and that somehow that ogre so terrifies my Department that we have lost our wits and sought to cause unnecessary difficulties for councils such as Bromley, which is, as I say, among the best in the land. That is not so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) belongs to a distinguished group, of which I was once a proud member. Having assented to the Government's general economic strategy, I cannot now say, when it becomes inconvenient for my Department, when it begins to be troublesome to my supporters, that that policy must be abandoned. Let me reminisce briefly. In my previous Department I had some discussions with my hon. Friend about university spending. Again, I had to say that if spending is above Government plans it must be brought down.

It is not difficult to make the connection between that spending and the central economic policy of the Government. Some of my hon. Friends, not so much today but when we have debated the matter previously—we shall come back to it in the new year—have made a greater difficulty here than is necessary.

Local authorities have accumulated large amounts of money through the sale of land and houses. Some of that has already been spent. The remainder has been used in two ways. It has been loaned to people outside the council to offset the council's debts, or loaned to other accounts within the council to reduce borrowing from outside. Such legitimate strategies reduce the net borrowing of local authorities and thereby they reduce the borrowing of the public sector as a whole. The figures are exceedingly large. We are talking about something in the region of £5 billion. The potential effect on public borrowing is enormous. The overhang of those figures is enormous.

This year, we were heading for an overspend of the order of £1 billion. That makes things a little different from the matter of student grants which my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) implicitly referred to, about which there was some dispute recently. In that case, at the end of the day, it was possible for the Government, moving sums of £10 million to £11 million around, to make some modification in policy which it would be absurd to describe as abandonment of any central financial strategy. The figures, although uncomfortable for the Treasury which always looks for saving, were hardly central. But we cannot treat figures of the order of £1 billion a year as marginal to the Government strategy. There is no question whatever about their effect on PSBR. The PSBR is a net figure. There is no problem about that at all.

There may be two separate problems. There may be those, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who have some difficulty with the economy policy itself. But that is a quite different category.

There may be those, such as the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), who take the view that different parts of the PSBR have different kinds of monetary effect. That is an argument which, as often happens with the beautiful arguments of the right hon. Gentleman, may be seen to dissipate a little when it is examined more closely. We can get into some rather curious difficulties if we take the view that different parts of the PSBR have different monetary effects. The implicit guarantees to the whole of the public sector have very similar effects.

We either have to say that we are assenting to the overall Government strategy or that we are not. We can say with regard to some things that, de minimis, there will be a £10 million adjustment to meet the legitimate worries of colleagues. But can we have any hope of being taken seriously by other spending Departments in Whitehall, by our own colleagues—or, indeed, by ourselves when we wave our Order Papers at the end of Budget speeches when taxes have been cut—if we say that figures of £500 million or £1 billion are marginal to the central strategy? I would say, with respect, that we cannot.

We shall look at the suggestions made by my hon. Friends to see whether there is any marginal way in which we can make the impact better or fairer, but the central argument is that we cannot abandon a great chunk of borrowing to its own devices and allow an overspend of perhaps £1 billion this year or perhaps hundreds of millions of pounds next year.

The hon. Member for Orpington suggested that the economic argument ran one way and that the political argument ran the other way. I have to take issue with my hon. Friend. I believe that two factors are absolutely central to the legitimacy of the Government. The first is that the Prime Minister and her Cabinet, backed by Conservative Members in Parliament and by our supporters in the constituencies, have restored a genuine pride and strength to Britain's position overseas.

The second aspect, which is central to the feeling of all our supporters, is that against all seductions — some

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

from our own side and others, less attractive, from the other side of the House—we have stuck to the economic policy with which we started. Indeed, it is fair to say that we have stuck to it through thick and thin.

In my previous Department I used to have to say to our supporters, "I quite understand the importance of university spending, but at the heart of our mandate is the belief that we must stick to our guns on the broad economic policy. Are you really asking me to abandon it?" That is itself a political argument. Once the story gets about that the Government will in the end be pushed off their course, that will snap the thread that has bound us to much greater continuity of support — from the Conservative party and people outside it — than most other Governments have achieved in recent times.

Mr. Stanbrook: It is not the legitimacy of the Government that is at stake but their credibility. They appear to be dishonouring promises on which many people, including councillors, have acted. It is not good enough to say that the economic policy of the Government made that necessary. The political argument is that the Government must keep their promises, and that they must not let down people or local authorities. That is far more important in the long run, and far more related to whether the Government will be re-elected.

Mr. Waldegrave: I accept entirely the word "credibility". Perhaps it is a better word than "legitimacy". I am saying that the central, overriding promise of the Government was that they would see through an economic policy which we all knew, and which some people in advance believed was too difficult to follow through, and warned us that we could not do it. We are doing it, and we are sticking to it. That is the promise, both explicit and implicit, in a range of the policies that the Government have had to adopt—many of them very unpopular—and it is why it is so astonishing to the Opposition that, despite that, our support in the opinion polls does not disappear.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Enfield, Southgate?

Mr. Waldegrave: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would not want to refer to that by-election from his party's point of view. The support has remained because people have said that they understand the often difficult decisions that we have had to take. They have a justification that makes sense, tough though it is, and which is what, above all, keeps us together.

I do not believe that it is easy to break the link between this kind of capital spending out of accumulated receipts and the PSBR. That link is quite clear. The link between the PSBR and the Government's central economic policy is equally clear. Following my right hon. Friend's statement and the emergency debate after it, I heard nothing from my right hon. and hon. Friends to make me doubt the linkage between those two. I have heard plenty of people saying that we must moderate or change the policy in that case. But then I run up against the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington used, only I use it in the opposite way and say that if we move away from the policy, we are lost, because we are left with the tough decisions that we have had to make over the years, having abandoned the policy, too.

I cannot resist referring briefly to the greatest of our noble Friends. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt), I have a tremendous affection for Lord Stockton. However, I wonder whether, in retrospect, we shall see again that period of tremendously expanded council house building which he undertook as being the high point of his career. It is so often in those post-war housing estates that we face the most severe problems today.

Putting that aside, I want to call the noble Lord in aid because, when he was accused of having a policy of stop-go, he said in his inimitable way that he had never seen how it was possible to drive a car without using both the brake and the accelerator. That has always seemed to me to be a good answer. We had a period when there was underspend, and we tried to bring it forward and say that, without any damage to the central policy, we could afford to do more. This year, demonstrably, we are way over the top. All the indications were that we would be for next year. We decided that we had to slow down.

We are talking only about the phasing over a longer period of the spending of these receipts. If we go back into a period of underspend, the time may come to try to steer a little more spending. Inevitably, that makes very difficult the management of programmes in the councils. The interests and convenience of administration at one level are sometimes at conflict with the interests and necessities of national administration at another. This is sometimes inevitable, though it is part of the process of good government to try to diminish it as much as possible.

There is no question of the measures that we have taken having been introduced in any way as a policy aimed at Bromley or a policy which means that Bromley has failed or is at fault in some way. The policy has had to be applied nationally because of the danger to our borrowing limits. Since it derives largely from the overhang of past receipts, it is even more inconvenient for those with receipts. That, too, is inevitable. It causes problems of delay and gives us trouble over other high priorities, such as the housing improvement grants programme. However, it derives not from wilfulness or from the fact that the ogre referred to has terrified us out of our wits and out of our political senses, but from the fact that overspends of £500 million or £1 billion, directly reflected in the PSBR, cannot, if we assent to the Government's economic policy, be taken as other than matters of the deepest concern to all of us—in the Cabinet and, I hope, in the Conservative party in the House and in the constituencies.

However, I well understand the difficulties that I, like any other hon. Member, will have at the weekend in explaining matters to people who will be upset about not getting their improvement grants on time. That is a job of political leadership which we must undertake, difficult as it is.

Sport in London

1.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This may be the only opportunity that I ever get to speak at the Opposition Dispatch Box, so I have seized that opportunity.

My reason for seeking an Adjournment debate on sport in London was the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who is responsible for sport, during Question Time last month. He said:

"Only in the last 12 to 18 months has the GLC started to show some interest in sport in the metropolis. The London boroughs and the metropolitan districts are infinitely better prepared to know what is required at local level. The GLC has only come along later to shell out our constituents' money for wrong projects."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 913.]

That statement was as profoundly oblivious to the truth as it was offensive to myself and my colleagues at county hall.

The Minister's apparent ignorance is exceeded only by his malice towards the GLC, but that is typical of Department of the Environment Ministers who try to cover up their appallingly weak case for the abolition of the GLC by a combination of bluster and insults.

However, there is no excuse for ignorance on the part of the Under-Secretary, who is to reply to the debate, or his civil servants, so I shall start by telling the hon. Gentleman what the GLC does for sport in London. He may stop me at any time either to identify what he described as "wrong projects" or to apologise for his comments.

When the Labour party won the 1981 GLC elections, I became chairman of the arts and recreation committee. I asked my vice-chairman, Mr. Peter Pitt, to take over responsibility for sport in London. He performed that task well and is now the chairman of the arts and recreation committee, so sport is well served by having him in that position in county hall.

However, although Mr. Pitt was the first person at county hall to be given specific responsibilities for sport, the London county council first established county hall's involvement with sport. The LCC started London sports championships in 1946; the GLC has built on that and organises 11 major championships ranging from cyclo-cross to swimming. The LCC started tennis coaching in the parks in 1951; the GLC had greatly expanded those schemes.

I must assume that when the Minister made his comments he knew that the GLC had met 50 per cent. of the running costs of Crystal palace—currently about £1 million from county hall — since the national sports centre was built in 1964. Indeed, Crystal palace is a GLC park.

The sports holding of the GLC includes two athletics stadia, four athletics tracks, 231 football pitches, including those at Hackney marshes, which has the greatest concentration of football pitches in Europe, 41 cricket pitches, 14 rugby pitches, 11 hockey pitches, three swimming baths, seven boating lakes, 116 tennis courts, seven bowling greens, nine horse riding facilities and two golf courses. Most of those facilities are located in the GLC's 5,500 acres of parks and open spaces and in the 11,000 acres of green belt land.

The GLC currently spends £41 million on parks, open spaces and recreation. That should be compared, for example, with the £7 million that the Sports Council has spent on sport in London over the past six years. The GLC is spending £41 million on recreation in this current year. But in the Local Government Bill, which is now in Committee, there is unfortunately no recognition whatever of that enormous contribution made by the GLC, or of the larger contribution, in financial terms, made by the metropolitan county councils.

One feels that the Minister has let down sport very badly. The Minister for the Arts was able to obtain an extra £34 million of central Government funding for the arts after the arts lobby really went to work on him; but I believe that the Minister with responsibility for sport has let down the sports community by singularly failing to secure additional funding, or certainly failing until now to announce what funding he has got. Frankly, he should be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

Apart from the Minister's failures, there are other reasons why sport does not seem to rate so highly in the priorities of this Government, or indeed in those of previous Governments. First, sport cannot mobilise the powerful establishment figures that the arts world can. There is no real sports lobby as such. Secondly, the Sports Council has proved itself to be toothless and ineffective in acting for sport in the political arena. Perhaps that is because too many administrators in sport are conservative with a small and a large "C". Thirdly, sport simply does not have the standing in our political community that it deserves.

That is in stark contrast to the situation in many other industrialised countries where sport is given a much higher political priority than Britain gives it. Fourthly, sports activities are largely working-class based in a society where middle-class values tend to predominate. In other words, we know very well what the Prime Minister thinks about Shakespeare and opera, but up to now we do not know what she thinks about sport. Perhaps one day she will let us know.

None of those reasons exonerates the Minister from the comments that he made in the House on 28 November. He seemed to assume that the London boroughs would take up the £41 million that the GLC is currently spending on sports and recreation facilities in London. That is nonsense; it is as nonsensical as when the Minister for the Arts said that the boroughs would take up the GLC's spending on the arts. But he changed his mind—or had his mind changed for him. However, the Minister responsible for sport seems to be just as blatant about that statement now as he was when he made it.

How can local authorities take up this enormous added burden? They have got rate capping. They have their own targets and there are also the penalties. We must continually bear in mind that sport rates as a discretionary service provided by local authorities and not as a mandatory one. Thus, if there is to be pressure on different services — as there undoubtedly will be given rate capping and further reductions in the expenditure of local authorities—it will be the discretionary areas of council expenditure that go. I am afraid that that will include sport.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will say how he feels that the boroughs can in any way replace the GLC. For example, Mile End and Burgess parks were created by the GLC over several decades. The Lea Valley park would never have been created without a massive input from the GLC. The Brixton recreation centre is somewhat dear to my heart, because I was a member of Lambeth borough

[Mr. Tony Banks]

council when that project first came up. Lambeth has had to ask the GLC to take over responsibility for the centre, because, if Lambeth had to run it, it would soak up 40 per cent. of its amenity services budget, and put 4p on the rates in Lambeth. If the GLC is abolished, will Lambeth be asked to take back the Brixton recreation centre in 1986?

The Minister must address his mind to the whole question of sports centres in London—assuming that he can even be bothered to listen to me. It is quite obvious that the boroughs have those sports centres within their boundaries, but the centres themselves are regional in nature. Yesterday the GLC agreed a major package amounting to £1·75 million to support the construction of indoor sports halls in Peckham, Greenwich and Barking, and the upgrading of the Terence McMillan stadium in my own borough of Newham. I hope that the Minister will welcome that decision by the GLC—that is, if he can ever bring himself to say anything nice about the GLC. Because of the Government's expenditure restraints, especially on capital, local authorities would never have been able to consider the building of indoor sports halls without the support of the GLC. Will the Minister tell me whether the GLC was wrong to provide money for those facilities?

We need to know what the Government propose for those regional sports centres in London should the GLC be abolished. There is no mention of them in the Local Government Bill. If the Government manage to force the Bill through against good advice from both inside and outside the House, there will be calamitous results. We can trace what is happening already. For example, Hillingdon—a good Tory borough—closed the Uxbridge pool in 1982, despite 12,000 visits a year. It was reopened in 1984 by community groups with the assistance of the GLC. During the first eight months 48,000 visits have been recorded. Hillingdon intends to close the south Ruislip leisure centre on 31 December, yet that centre contains the only purpose-built gymnastic facilities in London. Only the GLC can rescue it. It is all very well to look at Albanian, Russian and American gymnasts performing for our television audiences, but what are we doing for gymnastics in London? We are closing down the only purpose-built facilities, and that is disgraceful.

Hammersmith and Fulham, another Tory borough, is considering selling the Eternit wharf sports centre and the Broadway squash centre. Will that authority be able or willing to take over responsibility for the West London stadium and Wormwood Scrubs should the GLC be abolished? Both those facilities are regional. It may be that the Conservative privateers are happy that local authorities should sell sports facilities, but unfortunately all that does is to reduce the access available to the poorest members of our community, especially the unemployed youth. The Scarman report had something to say about that, and I shall refer to it later.

The Minister may say that there will be plenty of cross-borough co-operation. I shall give him an example of that. In 1974 the GLC devolved Beckenham place park in south-east London to the boroughs — one third to Bromley and two thirds to Lewisham. To date, only Lewisham has contributed—it is bearing the full cost. What then are the chances of Barnet and Camden managing Hampstead heath on an amicable basis?

I wish to tell the Minister about some of the GLC's recent sports initiatives. He may think that many of them are wrong, and he can stop me and detail them if he wants to do so. The Scarman report influenced the GLC's policy on sports provision within the inner city. Scarman laid great stress on the role of recreational facilities. With 400,000 unemployed in London, clearly the provision of sports facilities as an ameliorative resource is something on which we must all agree.

The Government set up Action Sport in 1981 through the Sports Council. Again, due to cash limitations, the Sports Council has been unable to develop in the way that it might want. The GLC has given a grant to the Sports Council to help with the development of tennis and cricket initiatives in London. I understand that the Sports Council intends to give a further six months' funding for Action Sport, but the reaction from Hammersmith and Fulham is that it is not prepared to include such projects in long-term budgeting because of Government expenditure cuts and uncertainty. The fact is that the position in London is looking very bad, even before abolition.

The Sports Council, with which the GLC has a close relationship, developed its regional strategy with considerable assistance from the GLC planning staff. We were able to identify major areas of recreational deprivation in London. It would take a regional stategic authority like the GLC to tackle those problems in conjunction with the boroughs.

Among many other aspects of sport, the GLC has provided £1·8 million in individual grants to sports bodies during 1984 — for example, £100,000 to the British Olympic appeal and £68,000 to set up Sports Line for London, a telephone information service covering the whole of London. In the current year the GLC has given £55,000 to the Sports Aid Foundation, an organisation which I am sure the Minister supports. It does a great deal of splendid work in developing young sporting prospects. The London boroughs have given so far this year £350 to the foundation as opposed the GLC's £55,000.

The council has recently launched a series of major pilot schemes to encourage greater participation in sports by the disabled. It is developing a "football in the community" programme. The programme started at Fulham and it will be extended to other professional clubs in London.

I could list dozens of other grants and initiatives which have been made and taken by the GLC in sport. I shall give the Minister a copy of the council's reaction to the impact on sport in London should the GLC be abolished. The document is entitled "Recreation in Ruins". If he reads it, it might prevent him from making any more fatuous remarks about my council and its role in sport in London.

When the Minister reads "Recreation in Ruins", he will learn that the GLC is the largest local authority in the country that is providing sports facilities. The chairman of the council's arts and recreation committee, Mr. Peter Pitt, was correct when he said:

"If the abolition Bill is enacted, it will have a disastrous effect on recreation in the capital."

I shall conclude by asking the Minister some specific questions. I wish to be constructive. First, what extra resources will he be making available to the London boroughs when they take over the GLC's sports and recreation facilities should the GLC be abolished? Secondly, when will he be bringing forward proposals for a "limited" extension of central funding by the Sports

Council, as promised by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 11 April? How much will this "limited" extension amount to and when are the proposals to be put before us? Thirdly, which organisations has the Minister consulted over the future of sports facilities, events and schemes that are of "wider than local interest"? Those were the words used by his right hon. Friend on 11 April. If the Minister has consulted, what was the response of the organisations? Have the local sports councils of London been consulted? Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to meet a delegation from the London sports council's standing committee?

Fourthly, what is to be the future of the Brixton recreation centre and other GLC-funded sports centres in London which are regional in character? Who, for example, will take responsibility for Hackney marshes and the Herne hill stadium, which Southwark borough council has said it cannot afford to do? Fifthly, what is to be the future of Thamesday and the south bank weekend, each of which has attracted 300,000 visitors? What does the future hold for the Greater London horse show and the 11 greater London sports championships if the GLC is abolished?

Sixthly, the Minister said that the London marathon would be safe with the Government. Will the Government be prepared to provide funds equal to the GLC's effort to ensure that the marathon continues? Will it really be safe in the Government's hands? I remind the Minister that the previous Tory administration at county hall under the leadership of Sir Horace Cutler initiated a feasibility study on the possibility of holding the Olympic games in docklands. The present GLC wishes to host a future Commonwealth games. However, bids have to be made by the world's cities for these major international events. Who will speak for London if the GLC is abolished and there is no one authority speaking for sport and other areas of social activity and taking a citywide view?

The Minister has failed miserably to defend sport from the onslaught threatened by the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. The Local Government Bill scarcely acknowledges the existence of sports facilities. However, when the Minister answers my questions the sports world may feel less threatened than at present. If nothing else, I hope that I have demonstrated how ill-informed and gratuitously insulting the Minister was on 28 November when talking about GLC provision for sports facilities in London. I hope that he has learnt something this afternoon. I hope, too, that he will have the grace to withdraw his previous remarks and apologise to the House for what he said.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on his elevation to the Front Bench. He sells himself short if he thinks that he will not appear there again—I am sure that he will. The hon. Gentleman must realise that the time he has left me to speak will hardly allow me to answer all his points. I do not for one moment blame the hon. Gentleman for taking two thirds of the time of this debate.

I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his choice of subject, because this timing is all-important. His interest in sport, like that of the GLC in recent years, seems to be of recent origin. It is clear from his remarks that, to most people who genuinely believe in sport—not politics and sport — the greatest threat comes from the present occupants of county hall. Those who are genuinely concerned about sport believe that many events in recent weeks have proved that much of the ratepayers' money has been squandered in what has been described outside this place—I substantiate the point—as a sordid attempt to defend the GLC's record in a variety of spheres.

The hon. Gentleman has not provided us with a specific figure for that expenditure, part of which went to sport. For many people in London, it amounted to no more than a massive bulk purchase of whitewash. The hon. Gentleman should think about that point. I understand the difficulty the Socilaists and their colleagues have about county hall. The GLC was not set up some 20 years ago to oversee sport in the 32 London boroughs. The GLC has certainly had a part to play but it has not had a duty to oversee sport. In the past, the GLC has had a contribution to make. The fact is that, during the past 20 or so years, the GLC has lacked the historical expertise that is prevalent in the boroughs and the governing bodies.

We must oversee sport not only in London but throughout the country. We have the Sports Council, which was set up 10 or 11 years ago, and a regional council on sport and recreation which does great and good work in the south-east of England. The Sports Council has produced a strategy, "The Next Ten Years", and the Greater London and south-east regional council on sport has produced a report on sport in London and the south-east. The report is an excellent document, and I pay tribute to the work that has been done. The recommendations must now be implemented, and I believe that they would be better implemented by the local London boroughs.

The Government's record on sport generally is one of which we are justifiably proud. Since 1979 we have doubled the Sport Council's grant-in-aid to more than £30 million. My Department's contribution to the urban programme and the derelict land grant runs at more than £23 million a year. London has received a handsome share of that money. Since 1979 the Sports Council has made available nearly £8 million in grants and loans for well over 1,000 projects in our capital. No doubt the hon. Member for Newham, North-West will be delighted to learn that the London borough of Newham has received well over £500,000 for 16 capital projects, and that is just one small example of the assistance given.

We hear from the GLC of a range of statistics about its contribution to sport and recreation. The GLC's contribution is very recent. Let us be clear about the facts. The GLC's expenditure of £40 million a year, or whatever the lofty figure with which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West currently seeks to impress us, is not what it appears to be. At least £20 million a year goes on parks, tending flower beds and such services. They are important activities, and I certainly do not decry them. I take as much pleasure in London's parks as the hon. Gentleman does. He should not present this work and its annual costs as going to sport in London. The hon. Gentleman's figures tend to encompass the arts and recreation at its broadest. I ask the hon. Gentleman to concentrate the debate—today and in the future—on sport in London.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Macfarlane: I ask the hon. Gentleman to allow me to continue, because I wish to place a number of points on the record. Obviously, because of the many questions asked, I shall have to write to the hon. Gentleman in due course.

[Mr. Macfarlane]

The help for voluntary groups and projects that is trumpeted forth from county hall amounts, on the figures we have, to no less than £500,000. I certainly would not criticise individual grants, as the hon. Gentleman appears to ask me to do. They are mostly small grants, but they appear to be highly selective. They appear to be dotted around the London boroughs on the scattergun technique. Our criticism would be that such grants are a strange use of the funds and powers of a county council. Helping small clubs and schemes is surely a matter for the borough concerned. They have the necessary local knowledge. My criticism is that the GLC is highly selective and does not genuinely help all sport in our capital city. That is the change that we seek; we see no need for a massive bureaucracy such as the GLC to assist sport in minor ways by a few small grants. The boroughs should do it. That is our policy. They have the knowledge.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the GLC's contribution to Crystal palace. That has a strange ring to it. I have much more confidence in the future of the Crystal palace under the London borough of Bromley. It is a substantial regional facility, and the GLC has contributed significant funds to it. It is also, of course, a national centre. We propose, therefore, to enable the Sports Council to take over all the running and operation of Crystal palace to maintain its national and international place and reputation.

It is unfortunate but, alas, typical, that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should have decided, within recent months, to use such a popular facility as Crystal palace as a new stage for their threats and intimidation, and, as people involved in sport have said to me, what border on bully-boy tactics. The GLC promised grants and support and now it is going back on its promises. I ask whether that is consistent with the fine words that we have heard today about the GLC's contribution to sport.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for paying attention to the important role that the boroughs play. It is important to place on record the fact that the boroughs, despite the difficulties that they face, have increased the amount of money that they have spent on sport and recreation during the past year. The figures coming from the GLC show that that amounts to over £160 million. The importance of strategy has been mentioned, but there is no sporting strategy coming from county hall. The fundamental strategy for sport in London is participation, action sport and sport for Londoners. Those are the Sports Council's strategic priorities for the development for sport not just in London but throughout the country.

Mr. Macfarlane: My hon. Friend is perhaps better qualified than anyone in the House to talk about sport. He is a member of the Sports Council and he is a London Member who has represented his country at the highest level.

The fine words that we heard from the GLC spokesman this morning ring rather hollow. The GLC was not set up to cater for a strategy for sport in London. That is the problem that has confused so many of the people, who are responsible for local government and those who are on the governing bodies of sport. They are the best placed to run their sports at all levels.

My major criticism is that the GLC has sought to introduce politics into sport in a way that we have never seen before. It has pulled out of supporting our national centre at Crystal palace. It is not helping those people who represent and live in that part of London. That is sad. When it comes to it, I think that the GLC will sacrifice the interests of a major sporting facility in London simply because of political expediency. That is a poor example.

There have been many wild and exaggerated claims in recent months about the future of the London marathon. In recent years, many people have thought that it has been a highly successful event. I congratulate the major organisers, Sir Christopher Brasher and John Disley. They have made it the success that it is. Zetters pools has provided the use of a computer for processing all the applications.

Mr. Tony Banks: What about the GLC?

Mr. Macfarlane: It is nothing to do with the GLC. It is a wonderful event, which has been run by an organisation, and my Department has promised every assistance to the organisers since the first London marathon. The Department offered them one of its royal parks and the use of various routes through its royal parks.

The Government have also taken the lead elsewhere by stimulating investment in major new facilities. The Olsen shed project, which I launched in September this year, is a magnificent new project in docklands which arguably will be one of the finest centres in north-west Europe. It is a partnership, with money provided through the Government. They have contributed £3·2 million in a consortium of major national companies and the athletics governing body. I shall give further details in due course when I take up many of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. Early next year we shall be announcing—as we have for the past couple of years — pound-for-pound schemes, with the Government providing money with the private sector. Action sport has been a huge success here and in Birmingham. It has enabled 3,000 opportunities to be developed.

With the Sports Council and the regional council on sport and recreation, the structure is there, together with the 32 London boroughs. They are the ones who are best placed to know what is best. It is obvious that there is still a great deal to be done for sport in London, as, indeed, in most of our capital cities, but the Government are alive and alert to the measures that have to be introduced.

The demand for new facilities grows daily as leisure time increases. I agree on that with the hon. Gentleman. The Government recognise how important recreation is to the social fabric of our capital city, but, unlike the GLC, we have achieved a great deal in the past three or four years, and we shall continue so to do. The most important thing is to create the right structure outside politics and let sport run itself. The Sports Council and the regional council on sport and recreation are the experts. The hon. Gentleman and his acolytes in county hall are not.

Baha'i Community (Iran)

2 pm

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): The House will soon be adjourning for the Christmas recess. In this country, Christmas is a time for the unity of the family and religious worship. It is essentially a happy time. For Members of the Baha'i community, of whom there are some 5,000 in this country, it will not be a happy Christmas because they will be thinking of their families, friends and relatives in Iran who are still suffering great persecution. It is to that community that our thoughts and actions should turn. I am grateful for the opportunity of introducing this brief debate on the intense suffering of the Baha'i community in Iran and I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office for coming to reply to the debate. His great interest in the subject is much appreciated.

I emphasise that since my hon. Friend's answer to a written question on 16 May this year, the situation in Iran has worsened. While it is true that recently relations between Britain and Iran have improved — I much welcome that—I do not believe that the position of the Baha'i community has improved at the same time. I ask Her Majesty's Government constantly to remind themselves of the plight of the Baha'i community. I hope that the Minister will have the chance to affirm to the House today that the Government will take full advantage of the recently improved relations with Iran to alleviate in any way they can the problem of the Baha'i community.

I have maintained correspondence with some members of the Baha'i community in my constituency. They live in constant worry for members of their families among the estimated 300,000 Baha'is who have not been fortunate enough to escape from Iran. That fear for the lives of their relatives and friends is profound, and understandably so.

Before explaining the exact nature of the present Baha'i problem, it may be beneficial to the House for me to describe briefly the nature of the Baha'i faith, which is relatively new to me and has been explained clearly by my constituents. It was born and developed under Islam in the middle east in the 19th century. Arnold Toynbee described the faith as

"an independent religion, on a par with Islam, Christianity and other recognised world religions. Baha'ism is not a sect of some other religion; it is a separate religion and has the same status as other recognised faiths."

The implication is that the Baha'i faith is no heresy or perversion of an existing religion, but should be respected as a separate religion.

The Baha'is' creed does not threaten the existing regime in Iran in any way. A fundamental theme is the oneness of mankind, and the teachings of the faith are auxiliary to that principle: they are beliefs in education, individual freedom and equal respect for men and women.

Members of the Baha'i faith support efforts to bring about international unity which, they believe, will ensure progressively more equitable distribution of world wealth. They regard other world religions, however antagonistic their beliefs or morals, as providing the key to international unity.

I draw attention to the comments of Lord McNair who correctly said in another place on 10 February 1982 that the Baha'is reminded him of the Society of Friends, showing the same gentleness, tolerance and rejection of force. They have, however, been persistently subjected to intense persecution in Iran.

Although the 1979 revolution was hailed as a breakthrough for political liberty, persecution has since escalated. Since 1978, 188 named Baha'is have been executed and a further 15 have disappeared. A further 750 are believed to be in prison, 19 under sentence of death. I ask the House to consider the grave implications of that for their families and friends in this country and throughout the world. One of my Baha'i constituents has told me that since 1982 three members of her immediate family have been imprisoned and then hanged. I have also received specific reports of relatives being tortured. The House will understand if I do not go into the details here.

The House should roundly condemn the false justifications advanced by the Iranian Government for their behavior. The Baha'is have been accused of supporting the previous regime. Yet they refused all political appointments under the Shah. They are accused of being anti-Islam. On the contrary, they accept the divinity of the Koran as well as the Bible. Their headquarters in Israel is said to show Zionist sympathies. Yet that headquarters was established 80 years before the creation of the state of Israel. Finally, they are said to form part of a Western conspiracy concocted in the 19th century by the British Foreign Office in league with the United States and Russian Governments and have therefore been arrested on charges of conspiracy. If the Baha'is are not executed for their beliefs but for their alleged illicit activities against the state, that is a paradox as their religion forbids them to be involved in any kind of political activity.

In 1975, the Government of Iran ratified the international convenant on civil and political rights. They have also ratified several other significant covenants which together encapsulate the fundamental rights to life, freedom from torture, fair trial and freedom of conscience and opinion. In 1981, the Islamic Council issued a universal declaration of human rights, granting freedom of creed and protection from harassment by all official agencies. In addition, the Koran itself declares that minority religions must be protected under Moslem law. The treatment of the Baha'i community is therefore in direct contravention of the Iranian Government's own moral and religious principles.

The world in general and Britain in particular are justified in urging the Iranian Government to observe the basic principles of human justice and religious liberty. Those are the cornerstones of our society, and we should not be ashamed of championing those principles and broadcasting their importance to all Governments, especially Iran's. So far the British Government can only be congratulated on their contribution to the efforts o international organisations in condemning Iranian policy.

The United Nations has maintained constant pressure, and as my hon. Friend the Minister said in a written answer in May this year, the United Nations Economic and Social Council has vociferously deplored the persecution. In May 1984, the council decided to appoint a special representative to make a thorough study of the position. I understand that that was endorsed by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 29 August. The House would appreciate some information from the Minister as

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to how matters stand in relation to the United Nations resolution that has the endorsement of the Commission on Human Rights.

Similarly, on 10 April 1983, the European Parliament called upon Iran to suspend the persecution and condemned the

"gross violation of human rights."

The European Parliament asked individual Foreign Ministers to

"make representations . . . in order to . . . halt all manner of persecution and discrimination to which the Baha'i minority is subject."

That is a round condemnation and a clarion call. In addition, Australia, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada and the United States of America have all condemned the Iranian persecution.

While the persecution increases, the Government should increase their pressure on Iran. Full advantage should be taken of the recent improvement in relations between the two countries—an improvement which I wholeheartedly welcome. Regrettably, the openings for such action may be limited. The House will realise the many limitations upon direct pressure and persuasion, but the Government should continue to pursue this matter within the forum of international organisations.

The opportunity exists for the Government to exploit the thaw in relations for the good of the Baha'i. Those who are suffering in Iran, and those in my constituency, other constituencies and throughout the world, who live in constant fear for the lives of their families and friends in Iran, beg the Government to do all that they can and to use all their goodwill and muscle, directly and indirectly through international organisations, for the sake of the Baha'i community in Iran.

2.12 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) has done the House a service by raising this important matter, and I congratulate him warmly on the great deal of thought that he has put into the issue and on the knowledge that he has displayed of the plight of the Baha'i people in Iran. I assure him that I listened carefully to his views.

This matter causes the Government much concern. Indeed, they have taken several positive steps to try to help the Baha'i community in Iran, and I shall describe some of those steps in a moment. My hon. Friend echoed the disquiet that has been expressed by many hon. Members for many months, if not years. I have received many letters from hon. Members expressing anxiety on behalf of their constituents about the position of the Baha'i community in Iran. I will go further and say that I maintain close contact with representatives of the Baha'i community in the United Kingdom. Only yesterday I met the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, Mrs. Hardy, who also visited me in 1983 to express her worries about the Baha'i community in Iran. The assembly in this country keeps me and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials carefully briefed about developments there and their own anxieties—above all, about the imposition of the death penalty on many Baha'is. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to keep in very close touch with the leaders of the community in this country.

My hon. Friend spoke with great knowledge about the background to the Baha'i faith which, as he said, was established in Iran in the middle of the last century. It grew out of Shia Islam and its adherents describe it as an independent religion but one which is not opposed to Islam. It is a monotheistic faith. It acknowledges all past revelations but to the fundamental believers of Islam the Baha'i faith is regarded as a heresy. Baha'i communities exist in over 150 countries. In 23 countries, over 1 per cent. of the population are Baha'is. It is estimated that there are about 300,000 Baha'is in Iran, a very large number in India and several thousand in Europe. The community in the United Kingdom numbers about 5,000. They are organised into about 190 local assemblies, all of whom elect representatives to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom.

There are persistent accounts of the persecution of members of the Baha'i community in Iran, including a number of executions, to which my hon. Friend referred. The Baha'i community is able to produce a good deal of evidence of discrimination and ill treatment. Unlike the Christian community in Iran, the Baha'is are not a protected minority under the constitution. The Iranian authorities claim that no Baha'i has been persecuted or discriminated against as a result of his faith. Rather, they take the line that any Baha'is that suffer punishment do so for other reasons, such as political opposition to the Government, a point to which my hon. Friend referred during the course of his speech.

I should like to comment, first, on the attitude of Her Majesty's Government to human rights as a whole. We deplore the abuses of human rights that occur in many parts of the world. Indeed, in 1978 I wrote a pamphlet on the subject of human rights and foreign policy. A central element in our foreign policy is to work to defend and strengthen human rights in many parts of the world. We all share a sense of outrage over gross abuses, such as summary execution, torture, detention without trial, denial of political rights, repression of religious minorities and many other abuses of human rights. I believe that we in this House all share the desire to use Britain's influence to help to make the world more humane.

In my view, there is no one way of doing this. It is a continuous process of choosing the right means and the right time to take action which is likely to be effective. There is a range of options that we can and do pursue. These include bilateral pressure, representations in conjunction with our partners in the Ten or with other countries in various parts of the world and by taking a leading part in the United Nations—for example, the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall maintain all our efforts in this crucial field of human rights. We must, in each individual case, judge the best approach to adopt in order to help those whose rights are violated. The kind of influence we can best bring to bear will vary in each case.

As for Iran, one of several countries in which human rights abuses cause us great concern, the Baha'i community is subject to real and particular suffering. Our overriding concern as a Government, and that of my hon. Friend, is the safety and well-being of those to whom we are trying to give help. We must never at any stage do anything that we believe might jeopardise their prospects. Western representations on behalf of the Baha'i community have, on occasions, served only to strengthen Iranian feelings against the Baha'is. Britain is not the

country best placed to make bilateral representations on behalf of the Baha'is. Our historical involvement in Iran is an important factor that militates against our success in this matter at the moment. We must take care not to take action which is counter-productive. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree with that.

Equally, we shall not be afraid to voice concern and disquiet where that is necessary, appropriate and helpful. Against that background, in general, our best approach on the issue is to act in concert with our partners in the Ten and to couple that with action in international forums. A good deal has been done in both those respects.

The Ten—this is an important area in which we can help with some influence—view the persecution of the Baha'i community with great concern. The Iranian authorities have been made fully aware of the Ten's attitude in that matter through direct contracts with the Iranian Government. We have joined our partners in the Ten in a series of démarches by the representatives of the Ten.

The most recent example of such a démarche was on 2 October this year when representatives of the Ten in Teheran drew the attention of the Iranian Government to the deep concern felt by the Ten over continuing reports of the persecution of the Baha'i community in Iran. The representatives of the Ten handed over to the Iranians a list of the Baha'is reported to have been executed in the previous six months and explained the damage done to the image of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It was pointed out that the Ten member states, together with Iran, are signatories of the international covenant on civil and political rights, and consequently are under an obligation to take an interest in the matter. The Ten asked for assurances concerning human rights in Iran and the status of the Baha'i community.

The Ten followed that up on 29 November in a speech given by the Irish presidency on behalf of the Ten to the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly drawing attention to the persecution of the Baha'i community and reiterating their support for the appointment of a special representative of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to make a thorough study of human rights in Iran.

The Ten urgently renewed their appeal to the Government of Iran to adhere to their obligations under the international covenant on civil and political rights. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to urge the Ten to act vigorously in that way.

Then we come, as my hon. Friend rightly said, to action that we can take in the United Nations. A special representative was appointed following a resolution, co-sponsored by the United Kingdom, on human rights in Iran which was adopted on 14 March at the 40th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The resolution specifically referred to the Baha'is. In his speech, the United Kingdom delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Sir Anthony Williams, urged the Government of Iran to accord to all their citizens all the rights to which they are entitled, in particular the right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to a fair trial and the right to profess and practise their views and beliefs—religious, political and other—even when those do not chime with official dogma. Sir Anthony noted that persecution for religious reasons is, in the view of the United Kingdom, as intolerable as persecution for racial reasons. The United Kingdom will continue to take every opportunity to express its views on human rights in Iran at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. May I suggest to my hon. Friend that this is the most important forum as far as the United Nations is concerned?

My hon. Friend has launched a valuable debate and I have no doubt that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will note the views that he has expressed—views that have been echoed in other ways by many other hon. Members. I have sought to set out the Government's position and I have explained carefully the reasons for the steps that we have taken over the past few months. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to take seriously the views expressed by the Baha'i community and by my hon. Friend and many others.

I shall consider carefully the other points made by my hon. Friend. The plight of the Baha'is is a matter of legitimate international concern, and Her Majesty's Government will continue to take whatever action we judge to be the most helpful in partnership with the international community. I assure my hon. Friend that the anxieties of the Baha'i community will remain a matter of deep concern to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and myself in the coming months.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that the House will be very grateful for what the Minister has said. Has he any intelligence on whether the representative appointed by the United Nations commission to which he referred has been able to visit Iran? If not, will the Minister assure the House that when he has some information on the point he will communicate it to those who are interested in the subject, not only in this House but outside?

Mr. Luce: It will be the task of the representative to report back to the United Nations, and that will happen before too long. With regard to the activities of the representative and how far they have gone, I think that it would be best for me to write to my hon. Friend in due course. I shall let him know as soon as I can what progress the representative is making.

High Rise Flats

2.26 pm

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): May I start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by wishing you a happy Christmas and all the best for the new year? As it is Christmas, may I extend greetings to the Under-Secretary of State? I am informed that he is about to score his century in terms of replying to Adjournment and other debates. I hope that after today he will declare his innings closed and, for his own sake, move on to something different, as I think that he has been put in the hot seat rather too often. I regret that that is the last cheerful thing that I am able to say this afternoon.

The problem of families living in high rise and tower blocks is so desperately serious that, even at this time of the year, I have to express my concern—and that of thousands of others—at the plight of such families. I should like first to recall the history of this enormous social problem.

I understand that between 1945 and 1951 the Labour Government saw the future of housing policy, the relief of the problems of inner city areas, and the provision of decent homes, in terms of a major development in new towns. That policy was reversed in 1951, when the Conservative Government came into office. Instead of new towns being developed, there was increasing emphasis on slum clearance in the inner cities. The feeling was that the only way to achieve that aim was to build flats at a very high density. The construction industry welcomed the proposal and moved into system building. The larger firms in the construction industry develped some very healthy business in producing the major housing works in the inner city areas.

The problem of high rise blocks was particularly exacerbated by the Housing Subsidies Act 1956, which gave a higher subsidy for flats the higher they were built. That provision, along with system building by the construction industry — which enabled less skilled workers, at lower wages, to do the building—resulted in a proliferation of high rise blocks and tower blocks in many inner city areas.

In 1967, under the Labour Government, a new subsidy system was introduced which took away the incentive to build so high. In 1968 we had the Ronan Point disaster, and this began to make people think about whether we ought to be developing our towns and cities in this way. By the 1970s, very little high-rise or tower block building took place.

But, by the..., the damage had been done. I do not seek to blame anyone in particular, but it seems to me that a generation of architects, planners, civil servants and politicians of all parties was to blame for allowing the destruction of communities and for allowing a system of building in our cities which has caused havoc and will go on causing havoc until we tackle the problem in a way that we are not doing at present.

If I may be allowed a little historical latitude, I suppose that it can be said that a French architect, Le Corbusier, is probably one of the main people responsible, if we trace the architectural descent of these buildings——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

Mr. Dubs: I was saying that Le Corbusier, to my mind, carried a great deal of the responsibility. But in fact all those involved in decision making at the time were responsible for what has happened to many of our cities.

The effects of this type of building have influenced many people, but the direct consequences lie on those who live in high rise and tower blocks. Figures are not too easy to come by, but my understanding is that about 800,000 households live on the second floors or higher and that about 250,000 households live on the fourth floors or above. Altogether, some 300,000 children under the age of 16 live in flats on the second floors or higher. Most of these are local authority dwellings, of course, and the problem is especially serious in London where a large proportion of the tower and high-rise blocks have been built. I understand that about 170,000 children under the age of 16 live on the second floors or higher of these developments.

Living in these conditions has posed a number of serious problems for the people there. First, there is safety. I do not wish to use this debate to discuss the problems of Bison and the other systems building difficulties which have been the subject of numerous discussions and of much concern. I mention them only in passing. But the safety problems have involved everything from concrete falling from higher levels to fire hazards. It is no coincidence that the families on the top floors of one on my council estates are having to be moved out, much to their relief and pleasure, because there are not adequate fire safety exits.

We have had difficulties with asbestos. The Livingstone estate in my constituency has had to be emptied of its tenants so that the asbestos could be cleared out. The same asbestos problem has been found on other estates. We had the Ronan Point episode. We have had the Bison problem, and there have been others. We also have smaller problems such as defective windows and windows that cannot be locked properly.

Far and away the most serious problem is that of the isolation of people, especially families living in high-rise blocks. One has only to walk along those dark corridors, often without windows, with nothing but blank front doors, to feel the sense of isolation. There are no windows from these halls and stairways. The only windows are to the outside, from which no one can be seen walking by because they are too far above the ground. Some of the families living there feel a desperate sense of isolation.

Families cannot supervise their children if they wish to play outside. There was a tragic murder of a little girl near the Doddington estate in Battersea park some time ago. I am not saying that the murder was caused by that environment, but the fact that it occurred made parents even more reluctant to allow their children to play out of their sight.

There have been a number of tragic accidents and even falls from some of the higher blocks. Children have fallen. Adults have fallen. I shall give one or two examples in a moment.

The flats lack play spaces, and children are either not allowed to play outside or are cooped up for long periods. They cannot socialise. They cannot play outside and the flats are not big enough to allow them to play with their friends. There is a desperate sense of isolation.

All the evidence from many experts and successive surveys confirms that the physical and mental health of people living in tower blocks suffers. When they move out, their health improves. Even statistics on school attainment suggests that children in tower blocks do badly.

There are also problems of dampness, water penetration at higher levels, condensation, inadequate heating and rust affecting the steel reinforcements of buildings. In this modern technological age, we ought to be able to solve the problem of defective lifts. Lifts are out of order all too often in tower blocks. When that happens, how can people get out, go about their business or go shopping? They cannot do so unless they are prepared to talk down 16 floors. That is out of the question for a mother with a pram.

Pevsner wrote about the Doddington estate in his book on the architecture of south London. The estate is on the south side of Battersea Park road and consists of post-war council housing. Pevsner says:

"chiefly Wandsworth's disastrous mistake of the 1960s, the Doddington estate . . . by Emberton, Frank and Tardrew . . . The grey chequered concrete slab blocks marching beside the railway are a chilling monument to that mistaken era of high-rise and industrialised building . . . The homely brick details of the low shops, library, and health centre, loosely grouped around a pedestrian square off Battersea Park road, cannot compensate for the arid, empty spaces over the car parks, the bleak upper access ways, and the inhuman scale of the whole conception."

That is pretty clear.

There have been a number of tragic deaths in tower blocks. Children have fallen from balconies and out of windows. There have been suicides. A few years ago, a three-year-old child who wanted to play threw his tricycle from a 10th floor window, threw his plimsolls after it, climbed out after them and fell to his death. There are such tragic cases in many parts of the country and they demonstrate what can happen when children are cooped up in difficult conditions.

Some people say, "They manage to live in high-rise blocks abroad." The luxurious New York penthouse suite is a byword in the living style of the rich. However, the Department of the Environment's study "Families in Flats" revealed that even a fairly brief investigation in Europe showed that people on the Continent did not like high-rise living.

The only people who like high-rise living are those who are childless and fairly affluent and have a way of escape at weekends. For them, it is not so bad, but for people for whom life on the 15th floor is a reality day in and day out, it is tragic. They have no way of escape and usually they cannot afford to get away for the day, let alone for the weekend.

Last month, I asked the Secretary of State for the Environment about children in high-rise flats. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment replied:

"The Department's report 'Families in Flats' was sent in 1981 to the local authorities known to have multi-storey family dwellings in their stock. It concluded that it is preferable for families with young children to occupy houses or flats below the second storey. My right hon. Friend does not consider that further advice is needed." — [*Official Report*, 26 November 1984; Vol. 68, *c. 400.*]

Of course it is preferable for families to live at a lower level, but that is a rather complacent statement and surely understates the gravity of the problem.

Tower blocks will be home for some people for the rest of their lives. Although they may want to get out, they cannot do so. My difficulty is that it is hard to know whether it is right to remind people of the awful conditions in which they live, and thereby increase their dissatisfaction, or whether I should hold off and say less. I have come to the conclusion that it is right to describe such things exactly as they are, and to accept that on some of those estates the majority want to get out. It cannot be any way to live if most people are saying, "I can't stand it here. Get me out at any price." But those people cannot get out, because of the combination of the Government's policies and in Wandsworth's case, the council's policies.

The recent announcement of a cut in housing investment has only made the problem worse — a problem resulting from cuts in housing investment ever since 1979. The people cannot afford to move out and to buy elsewhere, because they just do not have the money. Many of them are on supplementary benefit and many are desperately poor.

Wandsworth council is selling not only council flats to sitting tenants, but almost every single council property that becomes vacant on any decent council estate. As a result, there are no empty flats on the nicer estates into which people from the tower blocks could move. That is so, even though the need for such a move may be compelling and urgent and have a high medical priority. That is why people feel trapped and are desperate. That is why, at almost every Friday evening surgery that I hold, people burst into tears in their desperation, and plead with me to help to alleviate their housing problems. They almost always come from such estates.

The real insult is that a mile or two away from some of those high-rise estates in my constituency is something called the Easthill estate. It is a low-rise estate that was built by the Labour council and completed by the Tories when they took over after 1978. The whole estate was sold to people who for the most part did not come from the area and were not on the housing waiting list. They moved over from the north side of the Thames. The ultimate insult to those on the Doddington estate, or living in York gardens and on the other estates is that the Easthill estate has "for sale" signs, as those who bought their properties are now trying to make a profit and to move away.

What action can we take? First, we need recognition of the seriousness of the problem. Secondly, the Government should provide more information about the defects in those high-rise and tower blocks. On 23 October, the Government announced that there was to be an inquiry into large panel systems. I wonder what progress there has been. Will the Government consider encouraging local authorities to develop works programmes so that defective blocks that can be improved, are improved rapidly? Above all, will the Government state not that it would be nice if people with children were not in tower blocks, but that it should be the urgent priority of all local authorities to ensure that parents with young children do not live in such blocks, and certainly do not live above the second floor.

Of course, the Government cannot say that at the moment because there are no houses into which people can move. Therefore, we need a change in attitude towards housing policy. We need cash for investment, and local authorities and central Government must accept that the

[Mr. Dubs]

problem is urgent and that it should be tackled by recognising it, and by having enough money available so that houses and low-rise flats can be built, thus enabling people to move out of the tower blocks.

If the defects in existing high-rise buildings cannot be remedied—and in some cases they cannot be—there is no alternative but to bulldoze them. But high-rise blocks are suitable for some people, provided that the defects can be tackled. There are young people, single people, students and childless couples who might well say that if the lifts are working and the main defects are put right, they would be happy to live there. But for people with children, that is no way for them to spend their lives.

I should like to make a plea on behalf of the hundreds and thousands of families living in such flats. It will be a bleak Christmas and a depressing new year for them. There will be many bleak Christmases and depressing new years for them while they are cooped up with their young children in such flats. We have no right to deny our fellow citizens decent housing and decent lives. But as long as they are living in such conditions, we are denying them just that. We need not complacency from the Government but something that recognises the problem and indicates that action will be taken.

2.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): This is an important debate on a very important subject. It has been introduced, as one would expect, in a fluent and compassionate way by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs). Like him, I represent thousands of people who live in high rise flats. I cut my political teeth canvassing the residents of tower blocks in Wandsworth and Clapham 15 years ago. In about 40 minutes I will be at my advice bureau in Acton, doubtless seeing people from the south Acton estate who will be raising with me exactly the sort of problems mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

When I looked at the Order Paper and saw the subject for debate, I thought that it had a familiar ring to it. Indeed, it was the subject of my first Adjournment debate in this House 10½ years ago. I confess that, in opposition, I felt a mild sadistic pleasure in keeping up late at night a whole series of Ministers who had to debate with me important subjects such as the height requirements for entrance to the police force, the problem of take-away food shops in London and the need for better provision for cyclists.

Shortly before the 1979 election, after my 10th such Adjournment debate, I had no idea of the scale of retributive justice that would be visited on me. My private office tells me, with a visible lack of enthusiasm, that since 1979 I have participated in a further 89 Adjournment debates, making this—as the hon. Gentleman rightly said—my 100th. I have no idea whether that is precedented. A number of my ministerial colleagues set out on the same path in 1979, but they have either displayed enough independence of action and originality of thought and been promoted or they have displayed too much and been sacked. My sympathies lie with the occupants of the Chair and my hon. Friends from the Whips Office who have had to sit through all this, no doubt to report to their chiefs any incipient trace of incoherence.

Looking back at what I said 10 years ago, and listening to the hon. Gentleman this afternoon, I find that our concerns are very similar about the way in which the very hostile physical environment of our high rise blocks can lead to social and family stress. I said then that high rise blocks were no place for families with children. At that time, 500,000 families were living in them. Since I spoke in that debate substantial progress has been made in reducing the problems in several different ways. Large numbers of families with children have been moved out of tower blocks. We know a great deal more about the physical improvements that are needed to make these estates more acceptable places in which to live. We know far more about the importance of accessible, responsive local management and we have learnt something from experiments with different forms of tenure that seek to involve the tenants more directly either in the management or, in some cases, the ownership of the block. In a few cases, we have had to accept that the condition of the blocks has deteriorated beyond recovery, and that demolition had to be considered together with a fresh start.

I share the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the problem. The majority of high rise housing was built in the early 1960s when the local authorities, with the best of intentions, were clearing slums and were encouraged to build so-called units of accommodation quickly to overcome the severe shortage of housing. At that time, system building and factory methods of construction using concrete and other materials were in fashion, but often untried.

As a result, we had concentrations of high density housing in major conurbations, which created estates that soon became subject to physical deterioration and decline. That was compounded by remote and impersonal management with stereotyped and insensitive allocation policies, reinforced by an often ineffective repair and maintenance service. In turn, that contributed to feelings of insecurity and alienation among the residents and, in some cases, the residents reacted against that environment and began to abuse it. That completed the cycle of decay.

As I said 10 years ago, and repeat today, tower blocks are rarely suitable places for young children to grow up in. There are the practical problems, mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, of young mothers with small children trying to get to the 15th floor when the lifts are out of action, with all the problems of moving shopping, prams and washing. They are compounded by the sense of isolation, the strains of keeping children quiet and anxieties about the children's safety. Appallingly, between 1973 and 1979 about five children a year living on the second floor or above were killed falling from their homes.

In turn, the problems of the children have an impact on the parents. The study that we carried out with the National Children's Bureau showed that children who live above the first floor do worse at school and are more disturbed than children who live in houses, ground floor and first floor flats. They are affected by their mothers' dissatisfaction with multi-storey living.

The Department took the problems seriously as early as 1973. Under a Conservative Government, it issued guidance to local authorities in a circular making it clear that allocating high level flats to families with children was undesirable and should be avoided. In the debate that took place a decade ago I called for a stop to the building of high rise blocks. Modestly, I claim little personal credit for the

fact that that period marked the end of an era of high rise council building. At the same time I asked the then Labour Government to issue advice and guidance to local authorities to enable them to use the high rise blocks that they already had to the best advantage. That advice finally appeared under a Conservative Government in 1981 in the Department's report entitled "Families in Flats", to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We sent copies to 120 local authorities which were known to have multi-storey family dwellings in their stock.

Progress is being made. Over the past few years local authorities have done much to reduce the number of families with children living in tower blocks. In Birmingham, for example, 16 per cent. of the local authority's stock was high density housing in 1980, and 300 of the council's 420 tower blocks have now been designated as child-free. The national general household survey shows that the number of families with children under 16 living above the first floor has fallen by about one third between 1981 and 1982. Given the problems facing families living with children in tower blocks and high rise developments, that is only right.

There have been physical changes and physical improvements. High rise blocks need not be undesirable places in which to live for those without children merely because they are high rise. Numerous privately owned blocks here and abroad give witness to that fact. A recent report published by my Department entitled "Housing Initiatives for Single People of Working Age" gives examples of where enterprising local authorities have successfully converted multi-storey family dwellings into homes for the single. I understand that the London borough of Wandsworth has successfully let multi-storey flats to single people. Other improvements, such as the provision of entry phones, have given added security to the elderly, who without the problems associated with children in the block, such as noise, vandalism and break downs, can live in the blocks satisfactorily. The elderly often prefer their privacy, the views and the quietness in tower blocks without children.

My Department has helped this process directly through the urban programme. It has supported a wide range of schemes that compensate for the problems of living in high rise blocks. These projects range from the provision of entry phones, the conversion of empty flats into accommodation for community purposes, the provision of play and recreational facilities, general environmental improvements and improved management schemes. The cost of such schemes will run to several million pounds in 1984-85.

Thirdly, I mentioned the importance of good management. When it is not possible quickly to transfer families out of flats—for example, because of the lack of suitable alternative accommodation—much can be done by good, accessible management to make the flats more acceptable dwelling places.

My Department has worked with a number of local authorities through the priority estates project in improving the day-to-day management of these estates, by local authorities. In 1981, one of our project consultants gave some advice to Wandsworth borough on a management initiative on the Henry Prince eatate. I understand that this, together with modernisation of these pre-war flats, has been highly successful.

Some of the flatted estates require capital expenditure, and when this is made available one has to beef up the locally based housing management in the way that the priority estates project has shown; otherwise we invest the capital and the benefits are frittered away. In too many places, housing staff do not devote the time and effort required to ensure that repairs are carried out expeditiously and tenancy agreements are properly fulfilled. The problems of management are more complex on flatted estates where, for example, vandalism or the neglect of common parts affects many more people more directly than on so-called cottage estates.

My Department is convinced that more locally based management is needed, which operates within defined revenue expenditure budgets and is genuinely able to manage and co-ordinate essential functions such as repairs, caretaking and cleaning, lettings, rent arrears control, enforcement of tenancy conditions, all of which fall within council policy guidelines. It is essential that this duty is discharged with the maximum amount of consultation with and involvement of the residents. If hon. Members think that their authority may be unaware of the lessons of the priority estates project, there is an excellent report on local housing management which was published by my Department in February 1984 and which is available in the Library. I understand that Wandsworth is currently proposing to take some initiatives on the Doddington estate in Battersea, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. In some respects, this is similar to the approach advocated by my Department.

Fourthly, there are changes to tenure, and here I part company with the hon. Gentleman who referred disparagingly to council house sales. I do not accept that such sales exacerbate the problems. When a tower block is sold, it can help to reduce the problem by injecting private capital, which may not be available to the local authority, and the physical improvements that are necessary. Increasing the status of the tenants and their dwellings fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment. Enhanced tenancy participation in the management of estates has, in many cases, had the effect of reducing or eliminating many of the problems I have discussed. An extra capacity in the private sector has many benefits. There are several interesting examples of multi-storey blocks being brought into use by private developers who have bought the blocks, improved them and then resold them to single buyers and couples—usually first-time buyers. In a few cases we have had to cut our losses, demolish the tower block and start again. With the progress I have described, I hope that that last resort will become more rare. Much progress has been made. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not accuse me of complacency, because much more still needs to be done.

As the last speaker before the House rises for Christmas, I take this opportunity to wish a happy Christmas to you, Mr. Speaker, your Deputy Speakers and the Officers and staff of the House. No one is looking forward to Christmas more than Ministers in my Department. I note that, unlike the usual principle of last in, first out, this time it is last out, first in, because when the House resumes Department of the Environment questions will be raised. By that time we shall be reinvigorated and refreshed, and I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker and the rest of the House will be similarly refreshed. I take this opportunity to wish you, Sir, a happy Christmas and all the best for 1985.

Mr. Speaker: Before I adjourn the House, may I thank the Under-Secretary of State and congratulate him on his century. I imagine that the hon. Member hopes that the next century will be more slowly achieved. I wish the Leader of the House, the whole House and the staff a happy Christmas and a new year of good order.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Three o'clock, pursuant to the resolution of the House of 19 December.

House of Commons

Wednesday 9 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Expenditure)

1. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has so far been made in his inquiry into the use of sections 137 and 142 of the Local Government Act 1972 by local authorities.

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I hope to be in a position shortly to advise the House of the details of the intended impartial inquiry into these and other issues.

Mr. Amess: I wish my right hon. Friend and all other hon. Members a very happy and successful new year. However, is my right hon. Friend aware that a growing number of my hon. Friends are becoming impatient at the Government's seeming slowness in introducing legislation to curb the wasting of ratepayers' money by local authorities on political propaganda? Is my right hon. Friend also aware of the seeming inability of district auditors to act in the matter, because of their very narrow remit?

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. Friend for his good wishes for 1985. I am sure that we shall need them all.

The spending of money by councils on political propaganda is scandalous. My hon. Friend's own council spends money in that way. The Greater London council has already spent about £10 million and the metropolitan counties £3 million. As many hon. Members will know, Westminster city council has won the first round of a court case against the Inner London education authority, which wishes to spend £750,000 of ratepayers' money. The case is going to appeal.

This is an area of some clouded views. If the court case does not resolve the matter, we do not preclude legislation.

Mr. Conway: Has my right hon. Friend's Department consulted the Government Law Officers on this matter? If such consultation takes place, will he direct the attention of the Law Officers to the placing of advertisements by local authorities in organs such as the *Labour Herald*?

Mr. Baker: Yes, we have consulted the Law Officers, and I shall certainly draw to their attention the point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: Is it not a complete disgrace and an absolute abuse that local authorities such as the Labour-dominated Warrington borough council should use ratepayers' money for the support of striking miners, especially when many of those ratepayers are, through no fault of their own, unfortunately unemployed?

Mr. Baker: There is no doubt that certain Labour-controlled authorities are using their powers under section 137 in a way never envisaged in the original legislation. That is why there is to be an impartial inquiry into that abuse and many others as well.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister tell the House how much taxpayers' money was spent on bringing out the Conservative party propaganda leaflets entitled "After the GLC" and "After the Metropolitan County Councils"? Was the material based on the Central Office handout just released by the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Baker: The two admirable leaflets which the hon. Gentleman is holding up are not political propaganda. They contain an explanation of the main points of the Government's proposal. It is well precedented for Governments to produce such leaflets of explanation after Second Reading. It was done in the case of the Telecommunications Bill and of the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill. The cost was about £9,600, which would not buy even half a page in the *Daily Mirror*.

Mr. Straw: While the power of local authorities to spend money for information purposes is closely regulated under legislation passed by the Conservative party in 1972, is it not true that central Government have a wholly unfettered power to spend taxpayers' money, and that it is the Government who have spent money scandalously, in support of abolition proposals which have not been approved by the House, of their tendentious defence policies and of privatisation?

Mr. Baker: The conventions regarding the spending of advertising money by the Government are well known and have been observed by successive Governments. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have acted within the conventions that successive Governments have followed.

Departmental Costs

2. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I shall continue to use MINIS and my Department's budgeting systems to keep these costs under close and regular review.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that local authorities are doing everything in their power to control their running costs?

Mr. Jenkin: Many local authorities are, but I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the series of value-for-money reports being produced by the Audit Commission which suggest that if all local authorities followed the precepts there laid out they could save many hundreds of millions of pounds. That would be of great value to ratepayers.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Secretary of State agree that the best judges of whether a service is good value for money are ratepayers and taxpayers? Does he further agree

that the best facility to enable them to make such a judgment would be for the right hon. Gentleman to announce this afternoon that his Department will support fully the Bill, which is to be introduced soon, to secure freedom of information and access to information in local government? Will the right hon. Gentleman make such a commitment and carry it through during the rest of this Session?

Mr. Jenkin: That matter goes wider than the original question. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to await the Government's reaction to that Bill.

Mr. Steen: Has my right hon. Friend considered closing down the public land registers, which cost his Department about £250,000 a year to maintain and which, in the past four years, have sold only 2,000 acres of publicly held land? Does he agree that the best thing would be to auction off publicly held land which is dormant, redundant and derelict?

Mr. Jenkin: I cannot accept my hon. Friend's suggestion. The land registers have proved an immensely valuable means of bringing to the attention of builders and others the fact that public land is available and should be put on the market. Many hundreds of acres have been sold. I have now made the first orders, using my statutory powers, to oblige certain authorities to disgorge land for which they do not appear to have any valid use. That would not have been possible without the registers.

Mr. Janner: Does the compulsory, squalid and practical asset stripping of local authorities, especially those such as Leicester which have been rate-capped, not so add to the dictatorial powers of the right hon. Gentleman's Department that the running costs of the Department are bound to increase if, as is extremely unlikely, the Government are to give any decent service to people who have been served well by local authorities?

Mr. Jenkin: I am not sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman would want that question reported too widely in the *Leicester Mercury*, as I suspect that the great majority of ratepayers in Leicester are pleased that, for the first year, they are getting some relief from their rates under the rate-capping legislation. I should have thought that there was universal support for the view that land which is held by public authorities and which is not needed by them should be sold so that it can be put to good use. I am astonished that the hon. and learned Gentleman does not accept that proposition.

Hyde Park Memorial

3. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on proposals to establish a flower garden around the Hyde park memorial to the soldiers, civilians and horses killed by a terrorist bomb on 20 July 1982.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): Eighteen thousand spring and autumn flowering bulbs have recently been planted in the vicinity of the memorial plaque which will become naturalised in the grass and provide an annual display of blooms in the area. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's help in this development.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and his Department for their great co-operation in planting a beautiful garden around the memorial to the 12 soldiers, six civilians and seven horses who were killed in that appalling outrage. Some of the many hundreds of subscribers to the funds that I have raised for the purpose —many are of humble means, such as pensioners—are disappointed that roses have not been allowed. I understand that there is a horticultural problem in that it is difficult for rose trees or bushes to be planted in the area, but is there any way in which that problem can be overcome?

Mr. Macfarlane: I think that we must be guided by the advice of the bailiff of the royal parks. Each case must be considered in the context of the park. I believe that what we have now will provide a natural and harmonious display in spring and autumn. It is a most fitting and lasting tribute to those who so tragically lost their lives in July 1982.

Dr. Glyn: As a former officer of the Household Cavalry, I had the honour, while a Member of this House, to command the Queen's Lifeguard during a Session of Parliament. I am indeed grateful to the Minister. Is he aware that the incident is recorded permanently by the carrying of swords by the Queen's Lifeguard each time it passes the scene, as it does when it passes Buckingham Palace? This is a signal honour. We are delighted that the Minister has taken so much interest in this site. We shall welcome any additions for extras that he can provide.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. The regiment, the royal parks bailiff and officials in my Department have, I believe, provided the best and most suitable harmonious display in memory of those who lost their lives.

Rate Support Grant

4. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the local authority associations in response to his rate support grant proposals.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: At a meeting of the CCLGF on 11 December the associations gave me their initial reactions, which, as might be expected, varied widely.

Mr. Park: Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State has had no support from the local authority organisations? What communications, if any, has he received in support of the proposals?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. For example, the Association of County Councils welcomed improvements in targets for low spenders. Indeed, I have received a number of letters from individual authorities which have expressed their appreciation for the fact that we delivered the commitment that we made this time last year. They also welcomed the increased emphasis on GREs as a basis for grant distribution. Of course there have been criticisms from other authorities and associations, and no doubt we shall have an opportunity fairly shortly to debate this matter.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend take note that one of the Government's most loyal local authorities is Solihull, which, for its good stewardship, has been penalised £2 million in rate support grant?

Mr. Jenkin: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government has agreed to

meet him and a deputation from Solihull. We are constantly pressed by the local authority associations for improvements and changes in the GRE system, but when these changes are made they inevitably result in different effects on different local authorities because they are intended to be more accurate and and to reflect more precisely the circumstances of individual authorities.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Secretary of State aware that his predecessor visited the north east part of Coventry—the are represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Park) — and described the housing conditions there as among the worst he had ever seen? How does the right hon. Gentleman justify the decision just before Christmas to reduce to less than £8 million the housing allocation to Coventry? That is a third of what the city needs for its council housing, and according to council housing officials it means that it will take nearly 35 years for private housing in Coventry to be repaired and renovated to any sort of decent standard. How does the right hon. Gentleman justify these cuts?

Mr. Jenkin: That goes wider than the original question, which was about rate support grant. We should increasingly ask ourselves how those properties got like that. It was not the tenants. Who was it? How did they get like that? I believe that the record of many local authorities in relation to the management of council housing estates is a scandal, and I have no doubt whatever that many councils could do a great deal better if they really buckled down to it.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: When my right hon. Friend considered these representations, how did he justify the fact that a 25 per cent. discount is applied to London rateable values because they are so high, but that the same fair treatment is not applied to Hertfordshire, Berkshire or Surrey, as a result of which they lose rate support grant?

Mr. Jenkin: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's point. It is made regularly by the home counties. I must tell him that the differentials in rateable values in the Greater London area by and large justify the variation to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention. It could not be said to apply to the counties outside London. That position has now obtained for a number of years and is built into the statement that I made in December.

Mr. Straw: Is the Secretary of State aware that at least 16 Conservative-controlled shire counties have lost, in aggregate, £120 million of grant for next year over this year, including Essex, which has lost £19 million, Hertfordshire, which has lost £14 million, and Surrey, which has lost £16 million? Have those 16 authorities welcomed the rate support grant settlement?

Mr. Jenkin: Many points have been made to the Government about the rate support grant settlement, but there is general recognition, especially by many members of the ACC, that there is merit in restoring the councils' accountability to local ratepayers by reducing the share of expenditure which is met by the Government. In that we are merely following the practice of the previous Government. That is the main reason why the grant to those authorities has been reduced.

Water Supplies (Nitrate Pollution)

5. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in measures to reduce nitrate pollution of public water supplies.

Mr. Macfarlane: Trials of full-scale treatment plant to denitrify water supplies have been completed satisfactorily by the water research centre and the Anglian water authority at the authority's works at Bucklesham. Other research projects are under way. My Department is establishing a group of experts, with the help of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to evaluate information on nitrates and consider action to limit nitrate concentrations in water supplies. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is about to publish a code of good agriculture practice designed to minimise water pollution. It will include a section on fertilisers.

Mr. Taylor: Is my hon. Friend aware that levels are still rising? Is it not unreasonable that my constituents in Southend and many others are faced with the choice of paying much higher water rates to cover the horrendous costs of removing nitrates from water because of the health directive, or of receiving ever-increasingly polluted water supplies? Why are the Government so reluctant to curb the amount of nitrates going into water or to make the polluters pay, which happens in every other industry?

Mr. Macfarlane: My hon. Friend must be pleased that we have set up the group of experts. The co-ordination group will hold its first meeting on 14 January. Its terms of reference are to provide a forum for the evaluation of information collected about the sources, pathways and concentrations of nitrates in water. We shall see to what extent those levels, which he claims are occurring, are developing. We have acted thoroughly and positively and that group meets next week.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that, in addition to a priority for research, there must be proper priority for development regarding this grave problem? Does he accept that concern should be displayed not merely for public water supplies but for the contamination of virtually every water course and every wetland area in many parts of our islands?

Mr. Macfarlane: That is an important consideration, which is why my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and our officials are getting together urgently to evaluate all the facts and background information.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend be talking to the water authorities about the widespread concern that exists about the condition of rivers? The finger is pointed at fish farming, but there is increasing agreement that nitrates are a major cause of pollution in rivers. There has been a sad decline in the environmental aspects of river management.

Mr. Macfarlane: Yes, I shall also draw that to the attention of the nitrate co-ordination group.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister assure us that we shall have both research and urgent action, because this is a serious matter? Only recently one of the Minister's chief scientists told me that he regarded it as the greatest environmental time bomb facing Britain. Will he also

assure us that when the European Community directive on clean water is introduced there will not be major exemptions for waters that are affected by nitrogen?

Mr. Macfarlane: I must make it clear that since the beginning of last year my Department has started collecting regular information about public water supplies with high nitrate levels, and that there has been no overall increase in nitrate levels in those supplies. The group has many things to do. The House will agree that action can follow only the most exhaustive research, which is why we have responded quickly and why the first meeting takes place on Monday of next week.

National Infrastructure

6. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in response of the recent National Economic Development Office report on the state of the national infrastructure of roads, housing, the water and sewerage systems.

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be discussing this report at a meeting of the National Economic Development Council later today, at which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be in the chair.

Mr. Hamilton: As the report is of critical importance to every member of our community and is a devastating criticism of the Government's current policies, and as almost every independent policy review institution is now asserting that public investment is the best and the most effective way of reducing unemployment, will the Government accept the verdict of the general public, or will they wait until 5 million or 6 million people are on the dole before they see the error of their ways?

Mr. Gow: The best and most effective way of reducing unemployment is by pursuing policies that will result in honest money and sound finance, and by creating an economy in which there is low inflation and high investment. That is precisely what is occurring.

Dr. Hampson: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government's oil revenues will be £1,000 million more than expected because of the strength of the dollar, he could improve the infrastructure, especially housing, by taking a more relaxed view of how local authorities may use their accumulated receipts from the sale of council houses and other assets?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend knows that that matter was debated in the House on 19 December and that the Government secured a majority of 100 in that debate.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Is not one of our problems that the civil servants in the Treasury, whose job it is to advise the Chancellor of the Exchequer, know nothing about the problems of our northern cities? Would it not be a good idea for the Department of the Environment to organise coach trips at the weekends to take civil servants there so that they can see the problems that many Labour Members see every day?

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friends and I, as Ministers in the Department of the Environment, rightly make extensive visits to all parts of the kingdom to study precisely the matters to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

I have one further thing to say in response to the right hon. Gentleman's question. He was a member of an Administration—indeed, a member of the Cabinet—when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), wrote on 15 December 1976 to the then managing director of the International Monetary Fund:

> "It is . . . essential to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement . . . in order to create monetary conditions which will encourage investment and support sustained growth".

The Government are following those policies.

Mr. McCrindle: Has my hon. Friend seen the editorial in this morning's *Financial Times* under the heading of "Hard facts on infrastructure"? Does he note that the editorial concedes that a debt burden would be bad for future generations, but so, too, would a crumbling infrastructure? Leaving aside for the moment arguments about the benefits to the relief of unemployment that may flow from greater investment in the infrastructure, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he believes that, purely in terms of the infrastructure, there is a strong argument for additional investment in the very near future?

Mr. Gow: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important to have proper investment in the infrastructure. It is precisely for that reason that expenditure in the water industry will increase from £686 million this year to £769 million next year, and as planned to £870 million in 1987-88. The House will know that expenditure on roads will increase from £806 million this year to £824 million next year, and to £870 million in 1986-87. There is a programme of increasing investment in exactly the areas which my hon. Friend described.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister accept that the lack of public investment in the infrastucture back to 1976—the year which the Minister quoted—is holding up further private investment? What is his reply to the statement by that most moderate of employers' organisations, the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, which is responsible for 90 per cent. of the infrastucture, that

> "we are becoming increasingly fed up with the current propaganda campaign being waged by the Government to discredit the case for more infrastructure investment"?

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman will want to be reminded of some remarks by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) — *[Interruption.]* I was asked about the construction industry, and I was about to quote a comment by the right hon. Gentleman, to whom we shall all want to send our very best wishes. The right hon. Gentleman said:

> "We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession by boosting Government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists and that in so far as it ever did exist it worked on each occasion since the war by injecting a bigger dose of inflation into the economy."

I must tell the Opposition Front Bench that the best prospects for the construction industry are those that have been described, rightly, by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, namely, that we secure a soundly based economy. We do not intend to revert to the policies followed by the Labour Government of borrowing where they dared not tax and printing what they could not borrow.

Rate-capping

7. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to make a visit to all local authority areas designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: No, but I and other DOE Ministers make many such visits in the normal course of our duties.

Mr. Smith: In the course of his visits the right hon. Gentleman will doubtless have become aware of the anger of many residents in the rate-capped areas at the Government's proposals. Will the right hon. Gentleman at least say whether he is now prepared to meet a joint delegation from the rate-capped authorities? Will he also say what statutory basis, if any, exists for the date of 15 January which he has set down to the rate-capped authorities for the making of representations?

Mr. Jenkin: The rate-capped authorities should be aware that the timetable requires that we shall very shortly be laying the orders setting out those rate and precept limits that have not been agreed. Therefore, the time left for them to exercise their statutory rights individually to seek to argue for a higher rate or precept limit is running out rapidly. I urge any which are contemplating that to do so quickly. Once the orders have been laid it will be very much more difficult to secure any change. If I have an application—and I have not yet—for representatives of all the 16 or 18 authorities to meet me collectively, I shall be very happy to see them.

Mr. Couchman: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great offence taken by taxpayers and ratepayers when they are assailed by notices telling them that they have entered a rate-capped, nuclear-free zone and are wished a happy festive season by such as the London borough of Lewisham, which has painted expensive notices expressing good wishes and giving some political slogans denigrating the Government's action? Does my right hon. Friend agree that this reinforces yet again, if it needs reinforcement, the action that he has taken to cap their rates?

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with my hon. Friend, and it is a scandal. The Association of Labour Authorities in London has now voted to spend £350,000 on this campaign. The ratepayers in those authorities should know that £350,000 would buy no fewer than a quarter of a million meals on wheels. That is the alternative.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Secretary of State aware that in some of the local authorities now facing the axe from this Government one idea being canvassed strongly amongst their leaders is that they should refuse to pay any further instalments on local authority debt? The right hon. Gentleman should not be surprised at the action that might be taken in that respect. If it is right for banks such as Johnson Matthey to be trading in an insolvent fashion and then to be rescued by the Bank of England with a nod and wink from the Government, why should not the authorities do the same? It is the only way to salvation for some of them.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman studies such matters closely and he will know that debt repayments are a first charge upon the revenues of a local authority. He may or may not know that when one recent London local authority leader threatened not to pay his debt interest, his brokers swiftly ran him round all the money markets to say that it was pure political propaganda. That is the reality. Of course the local authorities will pay their debt charges. The people who will suffer if they do not will be their staff, who will not be paid, and the clients of the local authority services, who will not get their services.

Mr. Spencer: If my right hon. Friend receives representations from Leicester, will he take time to point out the impressive rejuvenation of the inner area that has already taken place under the inner area programme as a result of grants totalling more than £20 million which Leicester has received during the past four or five years?

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. and learned Friend is right. Leicester has had much help from the Government. I have not yet had from any local authority, certainly not from Leicester, an application for an increase in the rate limit that I have set. As I said earlier in reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), time has now almost run out for that. If they wish to come forward, they should do so promptly.

Dr. Cunningham: Does the Secretary of State recognise that his statement of willingness to meet the authorities will be welcomed? Certainly I welcome it. I hope that he will not hold rigidly to the date of 15 January, especially as two of the three weeks that have elapsed since he made his statement have been taken up by the holiday period, which as every sensible hon. Member knows, is a time when local authority business, like much Government and House of Commons business, does not take place.

Will the Secretary of State accept that his refusal in a Parliamentary answer to me of 18 December to spell out the principles on which he has exercised his discretion under the Act in fixing rates for authorities will inhibit the negotiations in which he says he is willing to engage? Will he rethink his answer?

Mr. Jenkin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, but I must make it clear that my readiness to meet a deputation cannot constitute an application from a local authority for a revision of the rate or precept limit. That can only be made individually by each authority. We have to proceed strictly by the legislation. It is only if there is negotiation about the limit, instigated by an application by an individual authority, that it would be appropriate, according to my clear legal advice, for me to become involved in spelling out the assumptions that have been made. If any authority wishes to object to the rate limit it must do so swiftly and individually and enter upon a discussion. The hon. Gentleman knows the parliamentary procedures, and we shall have to make the orders fairly soon.

Housing Statistics

8. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the proportion of the national housing stock which was either demolished or ceased to be used for occupation in the last 12 months for which statistics are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): In 1983-84 about one in a thousand of the total English housing stock was demolished or ceased to be available for housing use.

Mr. Hardy: Does that answer not demonstrate that the Government's complacency is outstripped only by their negligence? Is it not clear that if present policies are maintained, houses built today will have to remain in a habitable condition for longer than the life of even the oldest occupied building in our islands? Do houses built today have a life expectancy of 1,000 years?

Sir George Young: That is a rather naive question, because it does not take into account the age of the stock that we are considering. The rate of demolition has been falling for a number of years, not least because local authorities perceived the social damage that resulted from wholesale demolition in the 1960s. Under this Government the rate of demolition has continued to decline, but there has been a dramatic escalation in expenditure on improvement grants. Those trends should be commended rather than deplored.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Does not the freezing of council assets produce problems of principle out of all proportion to any theoretical benefit that the Treasury might derive? Will my hon. Friend confirm that one of the main points of selling council houses is to give to local authorities the capital that they need to meet their many and various requirements, particularly in housing?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has raised a slightly broader point, which we debated at length on, I think, 19 December. For next year we have made available about £3 billion for public investment in housing. That is broadly the same amount as was available this year and, indeed, in the two preceding years. Within that figure I hope that the local authorities will be able to tackle the essential elements that need attention within their housing stocks.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Why does the Minister pretend that he is not cutting housing investment programmes? Does he not realise that there have been massive cuts in the amount of money available for improvement grants and new house building, and that the Government's policies will lead inexorably to the return of the bulldozer and to massive slum clearances? Why has Sefton council, a Conservative-controlled authority which introduced a moratorium when the Minister requested restraint, had a massive cut in its housing investment programme, and why has it received only 30 per cent. of what it asked for? Housing will continue to decline, stocks will become worse, and yet improvement grants will not be given.

Sir George Young: Perhaps I can refresh the hon. Gentleman's memory. In the last year of the Labour Government £90 million was spent on improvement grants, while the figure for the last year was £900 million. That puts the hon. Gentleman's figures into perspective. The major cuts in public sector investment in housing took place between 1974 and 1979, when such investment fell by 45 per cent. after allowing for inflation. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that the comparable figure for this Government is 17 per cent. I hope that he will redirect his criticisms.

Mr. Powley: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is quite disgraceful that a Member of Parliament should be unable to obtain figures from local authorities for the number of council properties in their ownership that have been empty for up to 12 months? Is it not incumbent upon us to know the figures and to know what problems are so that we can see how to solve them?

Sir George Young: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is one of the matters that may be considered by the inquiry to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has referred. About 25,000 units have been empty for more than a year and it is essential that we do all that we can to bring them back into use. I regret that Norwich city council has not considered it necessary to give the Department essential information about its housing stock.

Mr. Alton: The Minister has told us that expenditure last year on improvement grants amounted to £900 million, but why did he not go on to say—as he said in a letter to me yesterday—that this year the level of expenditure on improvement grants is likely to be £700 million, meaning a reduction of £200 million? Does that not mean the return of the bulldozer to many of our cities? What will he do to ensure that the limited housing improvement grants are used in housing action areas?

Sir George Young: If the figure of £750 million were achieved, it would have to be compared with the figure for the last year of the Lib-Lab pact, which was £90 million. There is an element of hypocrisy in some of the questions that are directed at the Government about expenditure on improvement grants. That expenditure is at a record level.

Basildon (Rate-capping)

9. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Basildon district council on the subject of rate-capping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Basildon council has made a number of representations about rate limitation, but it has not yet said whether it accepts the proposed rate limit which my right hon. Friend announced on 11 December. The council has until 15 January to make representations about the proposed limit.

Mr. Proctor: Does my right hon. Friend think that Basildon district council has not contacted his office because it is embarrassed over the extravagance of its earlier claims over the impact of rate-capping, or because of its embarrassment over its extravagant spending on items such as housing administration? What does Basildon district council have to hide?

Mr. Baker: It is difficult to probe the motivations of Basildon district council. It budgeted for growth last year of 20 per cent., which is totally unrealistic. It can certainly live within the rate limit that we have set. The Audit Commission produced a report on Basildon, showing that it spends £600,000 more than the average council on its housing administration, and £180,000 on public relations.

Rate-capping

10. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with those local authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: None of the selected authorities applied for a redetermination of its expenditure level. In setting proposed rate and precept limits my right hon. Friend took account of a number of representations. I await comments on those proposed limits before 15 January.

Mr. Cartwright: Is the Secretary of State prepared to delay the laying of orders under the Rates Act for as long as possible in order to encourage the rate-capped authorities to argue their case with him? If they do not seek changes in the limits, is the Secretary of State committed to making orders that confirm the rate maximum that was laid down in his statement of 11 December?

Mr. Baker: Greenwich and the other rate-capped authorities have had since July of last year to come and discuss with my right hon. Friend and myself in the Department the actual expenditure levels. They declined to do so. Since 11 December they have had opportunities to come and discuss the rate limits. I have encouraged them to do so. I believe that the limit we have set for Greenwich is appropriate. We have used the figures that were available to us. I think that many of the ratepayers of Greenwich will welcome the rate limit, which is a reduction this year of about 19 per cent. The actual rate increases which the hon. Gentleman's constituents have had over the last three years have been 11 per cent., 59 per cent. and 20 per cent.

Construction Industry

11. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received over the past three months regarding the state of the construction industry.

Mr. Gow: I continue to maintain close contact with the construction industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be discussing with the National Economic Development Council later today its recent report on the infrastructure. My right hon. Friend and I hope to meet the Group of Eight next month.

Mr. Winnick: When will the Government recognise the appalling housing plight of so many people who need rented accommodation, as well as those tenants who are living in pre-war council dwellings that need to be modernised? The Minister referred to the Labour Government. Is it not a fact that in 1978, the last year of that Government, well over 107,000 housing starts were made in the public sector, compared to an estimated 40,000 last year? This year the figure is expected to be even less. Why do the Government refuse to take action to help people who need somewhere to live?

Mr. Gow: As the House knows, total public sector provision for housing in the coming financial year will be £3,055 million. Of that, £2,324 million will be made available to local authorities. I think that the hon. Gentleman will want to join in a tribute to the private sector, which in 1984 completed 150,000 houses, the highest figure for 10 years. I must remind the House of what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said earlier. Public sector investment in housing fell by 45 per cent. in real terms between 1974 and 1979, and between 1979 and 1984 it has fallen by 17 per cent. on the same basis.

Mr. Heffer: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Group of Eight is representative of all sides of the industry and that the employers' side is as much concerned, in fact even more concerned, than other sections of the industry? Is it not clear that he should make a stand on this issue? The press has said that he thought of resigning. Can he indicate whether he has obtained any concession from the Government so that in the coming year we may see positive results in the construction industry and not a further decline, such as we have seen over the last three years?

Mr. Gow: Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that on the Group of Eight there are representatives of the trade unions as well as of employers. As I said in my earlier reply, my right hon. Friend and I keep in close touch with the construction industry and are looking forward to our meeting next month with the Group of Eight. In reply to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, it is wise not to believe everything that one reads in newspapers.

Mrs. Renée Short: All of us who represent industrial areas know very well that the housing stock needs to be renewed and replaced. It is not surprising that ancient houses, built 50 years ago under the first public housing legislation, are standing empty when they have not been modernised and brought up to standard. Is the Minister aware that there are 400,000 or so unemployed building workers and that large amounts of building and construction machinery are lying about unused all over the country? Why on earth does the Minister not get these people back to work and see that houses are improved, and new houses are built, for those on the long waiting lists in all industrial areas?

Mr. Gow: It is a great mistake to believe that the best way of creating further employment is by higher public expenditure. The way in which we shall be able to create lasting jobs is by having no inflation and a more efficient economy. Certainly the prospects for revived employment depend crucially on a strong private sector.

I want to say one other thing to the hon. Lady in response to her question. It is a continuing scandal that 25,300 houses and flats owned by local authorities—most of which are Labour-controlled—have been empty for more than 12 months. We would be able to make a significant contribution to solving our housing problems if we could bring that stock back into use.

Mr. John Fraser: Is the Minister aware of the words of the president of the Building Employers Confederation early in December? He said that it cannot be good husbandry to pay 400,000 construction workers to do nothing while the nations's building stock slides further into decay and even larger bills for the future are run up because of lack of maintenance now? The Secretary of State must be regarded as the £5 billion Judas by the construction industry and the local authorities after putting another 50,000 people on the dole as a result of his statement on 18 December. Has the Secretary of State received one letter of support from any part of the construction industry for the savage programme of cuts which he introduced that day?

Mr. Gow: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the truth that output by the construction industry on repair and maintenance has grown and continues to grow. In 1983 £8·4 billion was spent—nearly £500 million up on the year before. We expect output in the construction industry to continue to grow. It is a great mistake to believe that the only engine of growth is in the public sector.

North-west Region (House Building)

12. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate how many houses were completed in the north-west region in 1979, and 1983; and how many are expected to be completed in 1984.

Sir George Young: Dwelling completions in 1979 and 1983 were about 23,900 and 18,200, respectively. The Department has made no estimate of the 1984 total, but completions in the first three quarters were about one fifth more than in the same period of 1983.

Mr. Lloyd: Is not that reply a disgrace to the Government? Are they not becoming the Government of slum dwellers because housing stock in the north-west is not being replaced or improved fast enough to ensure that its quality does not deteriorate dramatically? The Minister said that he did not threaten to resign. Is it not a shame that he did not take that step and so provide relief for all local authorities in the north-west?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider the broader picture, in particular private sector starts in the north-west. In 1982 and 1983 there were more private sector starts than in 1979. I am confident that that figure will be exceeded in the current year. Rather than concentrate on public sector housing, one must take a broader view of what is happening in the north-west. Completions in the first three quarters of 1984 were higher than in the preceding year. I hope that we can maintain that trend.

Enterprise Zones (Glanford and Scunthorpe)

13. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new companies have set up in the three enterprise zones in the constituency of Glanford and Scunthorpe, giving their names; how many net new jobs have been created thereby; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The best information that we have, which was provided by the local authorities, is that two firms have set up in the Glanford zone and five in the Scunthorpe zone since designation. To save the time of the House, I shall write to my hon. Friend with their names. We do not yet have details of jobs in the zones.

Mr. Hickmet: Is it not a fact that free enterprise zones, development area status, a massive building programme by English Industrial Estates and Government assistance to Scunthorpe should enable it to reduce unemployment significantly? Will my hon. Friend bear in mind anxiety about the local authority's decision to allow a retail development covering eight acres in one of the enterprise zones, which will cause damage to the town centre?

Sir George Young: I welcome the optimism in my hon. Friend's opening remarks. He has expressed concern to my Department about the retail development to which he refers. The evidence shows that retail developments in enterprise zones do not adversely affect existing retail projects in nearby shopping centres, not least because the economy of the area as a whole benefits from the injection of an enterprise zone. We have the matter under review and we shall be monitoring this year the new enterprise zones set up a few years ago.

Rate Support Grant

14. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many authorities are now likely to suffer grant holdback in 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: One hundred and thirty-nine local authorities in England are incurring grant holdback on the basis of their budgeted expenditure. The final number, which I hope will be fewer, will depend on their outturn expenditure.

Mrs. Clwyd: Why does not the Secretary of State follow the advice of the Audit Commission report and end those iniquitous penalties, which cause instability and higher rates to the tune of £400 million a year?

Mr. Jenkin: We do not accept the view of the Audit Commission's report, and at the moment that matter is before the Public Accounts Committee. Many of the Audit Commission's recommendations were sensible, and we are acting on some of them. However, we do not accept some of the figures and reasoning. The matter is before the Public Accounts Committee, and no doubt will come before the House in due course after the Committee has reported.

Mr. Yeo: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is widespread support for his efforts to reduce the central Government contribution to very extravagant local authorities, but that equally, there is great dismay in counties such as Suffolk, which face the prospect of holdback although they are spending substantially below the GREA level?

Mr. Jenkin: I know that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that — I am speaking from memory — Suffolk was one of the authorities which received the biggest increase in the target over this year's budget, which should have made it much less likely that it will exceed the target and so incur penalties. Our target methodology for this year for low-spending shire counties has been widely welcomed.

Methyl Isocyanate

15. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the environmental implications of the use, storage and disposal in the United Kingdom of the chemical methyl isocyanate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: Since the tragedy in Bhopal on 3 December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a small number of representations about the use, storage and disposal of the chemical methyl isocyanate. That chemical is not manufactured in the United Kingdom. It is used and stored by Ciba-Geigy at its factory near Grimsby, where a maximum of eight tonnes is stored in 40 drums containing 45 gallons each. I understand that in the Bhopal disaster 45 tonnes were stored in a single container. Very small quantities of the chemical are stored for research purposes at four other places in the United Kingdom. In all cases, storage is subject to strict control by the Health and Safety Executive. That chemical is included in schedule 3 to the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984, which came into force yesterday. Before and after the Bhopal disaster, officers of the Health and Safety Executive inspected the

factory at Ciba-Geigy and are satisfied as to the safety of the operation. I am advised that the disposal of that chemical is not considered to be a significant problem.

Mr. Eastham: I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to storage, but is it not a fact that nowadays there are grave misgivings about drivers not complying with regulations, which also applies to private haulier contractors who have been contracted to pick up that material? Is it not about time that we had legislation whereby environmental health officers had some control, not only over factories and chemical works in towns and cities, but over the routes taken by those vehicles?

Mr. Gow: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Of course safety is important in transit as well as in places where that chemical is stored permanently. If the hon. Gentleman has any evidence, I shall look into that and discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Will my hon. Friend undertake a wider inquiry and review of the relevant planning law and practice to ensure that when there are applications for the manufacture and storage of toxic materials the safety of the local community is fully ensured?

Mr. Gow: I give my hon. Friend that undertaking. Following the amendments made last year to the general development and use classes orders and the publication of advice on planning control over hazardous development, we have consulted on proposals for strengthening those regulations and controls, and legislation will be introduced as soon as possible.

Dr. Cunningham: Although no one wants to be alarmist, does the Minister accept that his statement is bound to cause some anxiety, not least because chemicals such as methyl isocyanate and others, which are extremely toxic and dangerous, are stored in urban locations—as he said but did not name — and problems can arise, particularly at the point of change from storage to transport? Is the Minister satisfied that he can expect the public to accept Government assurances in this kind of case when the Government have presided over a rundown of almost one third of their own target for the Factories Inspectorate, the people responsible for the monitoring, checking and supervision of these important matters?

Mr. Gow: There is no cause for public disquiet about this, because officers of the Health and Safety Executive visited the chemical plant near Grimsby before and after the tragedy at Bhopal. The officers of the Health and Safety Executive are satisfied that the operation at that factory is being carried out with full and proper regard to safety and strictly in accordance with the standards laid down.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the point of order arise directly out of Question Time?

Mr. Madden: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you will be concerned that, of the 35 questions tabled for reply today, only 15 were answered, primarily, in my view, because of the long-winded, ponderous replies given by Ministers. In view of the considerable expense incurred by officials and others in preparing for Question Time, and given that low reply rate, do you agree that unless Environment Ministers speed matters up next time they are in danger of being seen as an uneconomic unit?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot be responsible for the length of supplementary questions or the answers, but I have sympathy with what the hon. Member said. We should have got a little further than we did today at Question Time.

Michelin Tyre (Redundancies)

3.32 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"redundancies at the Michelin Tyre company in Stoke-on-Trent."

The matter is specific, because the Michelin Tyre company announced yesterday that tyre production in Stoke-on-Trent was to be slashed, and that 2,400 workers there would soon lose their jobs. It is important, because the lives of thousands of workers will be transformed. They will be plunged into the poverty of unemployment and, unless something is done about it, into the despair of long-term unemployment. They will even, tragically, be denied hope for future jobs for their children. I am pleased to see that the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry is present.

The matter is important also, because the dismissal of 2,400 workers shows that there is no steady economic recovery as the Government have claimed. It gives an ominous warning to the whole of British industry that if an efficient manufacturing firm such as Michelin cannot compete effectively at home and abroad, given the low value of the pound, then British firms are far more vulnerable to foreign competition than anyone has yet admitted.

The matter is urgent, because most of the workers are to lose their jobs by the end of April. The redundancies will add 2,400 to the already high unemployment total of 24,000 in north Staffordshire, giving a rate of about 13·5 per cent. It is calculated by Keele university that the knock-on effect — the kind of Maynard Keynes multiplier in reverse—will add a further 1,600, making a total of 4,000 more unemployed people in the area. If these figures are correct, the unemployment rate will shoot up to 14·4 per cent.—well over the national average of 13·2 per cent.

The matter it is also urgent—I address the Minister of State, Department of Industry, directly — because only a few weeks ago the Government designated areas for regional aid which excluded north Staffordshire. But in the light of these new circumstances, there should obviously be an immediate reappraisal. We need to debate the fact that the case for north Staffordshire to be given Government aid, formerly powerful, is now overwhelming and very urgent. In addition, emergency aid for north Staffordshire is now vital.

The matter is also urgent because the Michelin company needs help both to reduce the immediate job losses and to preserve tyre-making capacity for the future. We need to debate, as a matter of urgency, how the Government can advise and aid manufacturing companies such as the Michelin company, which are being crucified by foreign competition.

Unless action is taken very soon for the whole of British industry as well as for Michelin and north Staffordshire, our national manufacturing capacity will suffer a dramatic decline and we shall become a nationally derelict area. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will allow time to be found for an emergency debate on these vital issues.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) has asked leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"redundancies at the Michelin Tyre company in Stoke-on-Trent."

I have listened with great care to what the right hon. Gentleman has said. I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

British Embassy, Oslo (Union Information)

3.38 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I was able to tell you, Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago, but only then, because I heard the information only at 3 o'clock, that I should like to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of drawing attention to a matter of urgency which should take precedence over other business, namely,

"the decision of the British embassy in Oslo to demand information from a Norwegian trade union about the extent of its financial support for the National Union of Mineworkers."

[Laughter.]

Hon. Members may not laugh when they hear the implications of agreeing that foreign embassies in Britain can make direct approaches to organisations here.

The British embassy in Oslo has approached the Norwegian National Union of General Workers to demand an answer to two questions: first, "Have you provided financial support for the National Union of Mineworkers?"; secondly, "If so, how and in what form?". In my judgment, this development raises important issues, which I should like very briefly to summarise.

First, who authorised this action? Was it the Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet, the Prime Minister? Secondly, why was no report made to the House? Thirdly, what implications does this have for international relations? Is it now the view of the Government that foreign embassies in London can make demands on any organisations that they choose in pursuit of their own policies? Next, does this indicate that the Government are now a direct party to the dispute——

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): No.

Mr. Benn: Well, if the British embassy in Oslo is now seeking to pursue this matter, that makes it a direct participant in the dispute.

Is the sequestrator working under the direction of the courts or of the Foreign Secretary? Is the coal board, which is a party to the dispute, responsible for commissioning the embassy to make this inquiry?

The House should debate this matter. The action of the embassy is a sign of desperation by the Government, coming on top of the failure to secure a return to work and the possibility of a rail strike and an interruption of fuel supplies. Such a debate, which would be of considerable national importance, could be easily accommodated within this week's business.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the decision of the British embassy in Oslo to demand information from a Norwegian trade union about the extent of its financial support for the National Union of Mineworkers."

The right hon. Gentleman and the whole House know that the only decision that I have to take on these applications is whether the matter should have precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I listened with care to what the right hon. Gentleman said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter which he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10; and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Miss Hilda Murrell

3.41 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raised with you at midday today my intention to raise under Standing Order No. 10 a matter——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not say that.

Mr. Conway: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on how I can raise a matter of particular and singular importance to my constituency. Throughout the Christmas recess and as recently as yesterday, there has been considerable national coverage of the allegations made in the House on 19 December by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) who has, in the view of my constituents, impeded the apprehension of the murderer of my former constituent, Miss Hilda Murrell, by giving information to the House on 19 December which the police have subsequently denied. The hon. Gentleman alleged British secret service and intelligence involvement in the murder of Miss Murrell.

It is important that the House should have the opportunity to hear the reply to the hon. Member's allegations and to urge him to cease impeding the police in their inquiries.

Mr. Speaker: First of all, the hon. Gentleman should not raise in the House matters that he has discussed privately with me. Secondly, his point of order is not a matter for me. No doubt he had the opportunity to be present for the debate on 19 December and he must find other ways of pursuing that matter.

Weather Conditions (Heating and Shelter)

3.42 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise me on how issues affecting our constituents can be raised in the House today? Many elderly people desperately need assistance to pay their fuel bills and are suffering a great deal because of the bad weather.

Why has no Minister come to the House to give us a statement about what assistance, if any, is to be given to our elderly constituents? The Government have authority to make payments when there is a severe winter. That was last done in January 1982. Why has not the Secretary of State for Social Services or any of his ministerial colleagues come to the House to deal with the matter? So many elderly people live on inadequate incomes and they will not turn on their heating because they are frightened of the quarterly fuel bill that will arrive in four or six weeks. It is an appalling situation and we should have a statement from the Government.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member, and I need not advise him on parliamentary tactics. I am sure that he will realise, on reflection, that there are many ways in which he can raise such matters.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On another point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has any Minister suggested to you that the Government are prepared to make a statement about the homeless who are living on the streets in London, Liverpool and other places? Clearly, some are likely to die unless urgent steps are taken to provide shelter for them. Have Ministers given you any indication that they are taking emergency steps to deal with the problems caused by the present bad weather?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The answer to the hon. Gentleman is exactly the same as the answer that I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). There are other opportunities for raising these matters, and I have not received any such request.

Youth Charter

3.45 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to promote opportunities for young people in International Youth Year 1985 by establishing a youth charter giving rights and representation to young people: and for connected purposes.

I am pleased to be able to seek the leave of the House to bring in this Bill on the first sitting day of 1985, which is International Youth Year. At the earliest possible opportunity in the year, the House could, by giving me leave to bring in the Bill, express its concern for the problems faced by our young people, and its faith and confidence in them, by extending to them the rights and opportunities that would be contained in the youth charter that I propose.

I have referred to the problems faced by many young people. Regrettably, for many, this new year is no new dawn of hope. Four unemployed people out of 10 will be under 25 and 350,000 people will be on training schemes without the certainty of a job at the end. With 22,000 fewer university places than five years ago—equivalent to the closure of two universities the size of Cambridge — many young people will have their academic aspirations frustrated and will be denied the opportunities enjoyed by myself and my contemporaries only a decade ago. In 1985 drug abuse by young people will reach unprecedented levels, as will juvenile crime.

It is idle to expect that one Bill could remedy these many wrongs. Other political measures requiring Government initiative will be necessary. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I would welcome the appointment of a Minister to co-ordinate Government policies affecting young people. We are in danger of allowing a generation of young people to grow up many of whom feel totally alienated from the society and community of which they are members. During International Youth Year, my hon. Friends and I will try to bring before the House a series of measures which, if supported, would signal to the young people of our country our awareness of their problems and our willingness to respond to them.

In proposing a youth charter, it would be all too easy for me to fall into the trap of patronising the young or telling them what is best for them. Rather than do that, the charter would seek to establish rights and to create a framework within which young people could participate more fully in the affairs of the community and the decisions that affect or shape their lives. I hope that the charter would reflect the themes of International Youth Year: participation, development and peace.

Under the heading "participation" we would hope for greater involvement by young people in decision-making. We would propose a lower voting age and a lower age for candidature. At a time when the future of the world is in the hands of two super-power leaders in comparison with whom our own Prime Minister is a young chicken, is there any relevance in considering those at the other end of the age scale? The young have an important stake in the future, and what they lack in experience may be more than compensated for by the fresh ideas that they can bring forward. A number of causes now coming to the fore in politics — for example, environmental concern — were espoused by young people long before they gained political respectability.

At local level, we believe that there should be a right of youth representation on a number of local committees, including health councils, school and college boards and local education authority committees. There is a precedent in the case of the churches for the inclusion of representation on local education authorities. It seems reasonable, therefore, to extend the principle to the consumers of the system.

We believe that there should be an input into the local Manpower Services Commission committees from young people on youth training schemes. Those who take part in the schemes could put forward useful proposals for their improvement. We also believe that there should be greater youth representation on the local police authority. That view is in line with the recommendation of Lord Scarman in his report on the Brixton riots. This is yet another example of how involvement, and the responsibility that goes with it, can break down the barriers of hostility and alienation which are often found in relations between young people and the police.

We also recommend democratically elected local youth councils. They would be a forum in which young people could express their anxieties to statutory bodies in their areas. The worries of young people in decaying inner cities are very different from those of young people in rural communities, and it is important that someone should represent and communicate the views of young people.

With regard to development, a young person must be able to develop his personality. He can do that inadequately if he is unemployed, insufficiently trained or educated, or poorly housed. We should establish as a right the opportunity for all teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 to have a real choice between continuing in full-time education, taking a place on a much improved training scheme and finding employment. I admit that that would require resources, but it is not an especially new or radical suggestion. In International Youth Year, we should be prepared to look to the examples set by France and West Germany in the training and education of young people.

When young people want to take the initiative and create their own employment through co-operatives or self-employment, for example, statutory bodies such as the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, the Welsh Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board should have a remit to provide financial assistance and, more importantly, legal, managerial and marketing advice and expertise.

I am aware that some young people fail to develop their personalities through disadvantage, especially because of race or disability. The charter proposes a youth service which is managed substantially by young people to cater for the needs of such groups.

Development will not be confined to the individual—the wider community would benefit from the greater involvement of young people. A recent opinion poll, which was published in *The Times*, showed that 78 per cent. of 15 to 24-year-olds support a scheme for all young people to do voluntary community service on leaving school. Some voluntary schemes already exist. With the minimum of bureaucracy, we should like local bodies to be set up to ensure proper co-ordination between community and voluntary efforts.

The measures that I have outlined are by no means exhaustive. The third theme which ties them all together is peace.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What about young miners?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wallace: It is regrettable that we cannot legislate to create peace. However, we can establish a framework and an environment which fosters and promotes peace. A youth charter would try to do just that. It would try to ensure peace of mind for a person who might be frustrated by inadequate employment, unemployment or because his academic aspirations have been thwarted. It would promote peace in communities by encouraging participation and trying to break down barriers. When the House debates the great issues of world peace we should remember that few have a greater interest in it than the youth of today.

In commending the Bill, I ask the House to support measures that will promote the cause of youth, and allow the voice of youth to be heard. Perhaps more importantly, I ask the House and politicians of the older and not so old generations to listen to the voice of youth and pay heed to their anxieties and ideals in International Youth Year.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. James Wallace, Mr. David Alton, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Malcolm Bruce and Mr. A. J. Beith.

YOUTH CHARTER

Mr. James Wallace accordingly presented a Bill to promote opportunities for young people in International Youth Year 1985 by establishing a youth charter giving rights and representations to young people; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Orders of the Day

Shipbuilding Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.53 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a short and essentially technical measure. Its purpose is twofold. First, it extends the life of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme by 18 months and, secondly, it formally writes off certain irrecoverable outstanding loans made by the Shipbuilding Industry Board to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in the period 1968-72.

The shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme was first introduced in 1978, shortly after the nationalisation of shipbuilding. In introducing the Bill on Second Reading, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) described it primarily as a scheme

"to alleviate the human problems caused by any contraction of the industry".

He went on to acknowledge that

"shipbuilding industries all over the world are facing the inevitability of contraction"

and that

"this country cannot isolate itself from that trend".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1978; Vol. 942, c. 173-5.]

Those were wise words, of which from time to time we have had cause to remind him. He also emphasised the original limitation of the life of the scheme. At that time it was limited to two years. That was the period that the right hon. Gentleman then thought would take us past the then approaching slump in shipbuilding. In that regard he was perhaps less prophetic.

I recall the occasion well because I was the Opposition spokesman who had the task of welcoming the Bill. I did so, though with a slightly different emphasis. I saw it not just as a measure to alleviate the inevitable misery of redundancy but as a tool to help smooth the path of transition to competitive manning in the industry and to help people thus made redundant to move to the industries of the future. I still hold that view. No one would dispute that the scheme has contributed significantly over the years both to the alleviation of the problems of redundancy in a contracting industry and to progress in relation to the problems of contraction itself. It has proved a valuable tool in the management of change within shipbuilding and has helped in an extremely difficult period.

That is why in 1982 we introduced an order prolonging the life of the scheme until June this year. It was clear then that further contraction was likely. It would have been wrong to have allowed it to have lapsed during such a period of uncertainty, and prolongation seemed the sensible course. As events have shown, with the continued rapid decline in the fortunes of the industry and the consequent reduction in the work force, that was the right decision.

British Shipbuilders has taken advantage of the scheme to a considerable extent. About 35,000 workers in British Shipbuilders have benefited under the scheme at a total cost of £130 million since it began. Today, some 7,000 people are in receipt of the weekly payments. We are now

approaching the end of that extension, and the Government have had to decide whether to ask the House to extend the scheme once again. We took the decision to bring forward the measure before the House in the light of the industry's present position.

Merchant shipbuilding continues to face an enormously difficult market. Apart from the upturn of 1979-80, it has, for the whole period of nationalisation, fought an uphill struggle in a deep recession against highly competitive far eastern producers. The inevitable contraction, seen and accepted by the Opposition in 1977, has happened. The merchant shipbuilding sector of British Shipbuilders has halved and is now about 11,000 men, including engine building.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Gentlemen refers constantly to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Then we had a Labour Government who were working for an upturn in the economy. Since then we have had a Conservative Government who have allowed the shipbuilding and other industries to decline to the extent that there is now a continuing crisis. Is not that the basic reason why we are again facing this problem?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. Shipbuilding deals in an international market, and now, as then, there has been a substantial contraction internationally. As the hon. Gentleman knows, shipbuilding contracted at that time, and the words of the right hon. Member for Gorton which I have quoted showed that he envisaged that there would be some contraction. I do not blame the right hon. Gentleman for not foreseeing that the period of recession in international shipping would last very much longer than the period thought likely to be the case in 1979.

In the past 12 months, alongside the retrenchment, we have also seen within British Shipbuilders some encouraging signs of improving performance. British Shipbuilders is beginning to see marked improvements in throughput per man, even at a time of low work load. That is the period when productivity gains are the hardest to make.

Nineteen eighty-four will be remembered in British Shipbuilders as the year in which common sense prevailed, when a vital agreement on flexible working practices was signed and when the Cammell Laird work force voted with its feet to defy the militants. I hope that 1985 will prove to be the year when the benefits of a positive approach by management and work force show through in vitally needed new orders.

We must be under no illusions. British Shipbuilders still has a long way to go to achieve real stability and a firm future. It would be foolish to ignore the genuine risk that the market will force yet further rationalisation on the corporation. We must all recognise that, even to maintain its market share, it must become more competitive, which in turn means fewer people building the same number of ships.

Meanwhile, the Government intend to push ahead with the policies of privatisation stated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in July 1984. We shall seek to return as much as possible of the industry to the private sector. More immediately, we intend to sell the warship yards by March 1986. Taken with the privatisation of ship repair yards and the disposal last year of Scott Lithgow, this means that by the end of 1986 the public sector will account for less than one-third of the United Kingdom's shipbuilding industry and will employ only 17,000 to 18,000 people — 11,000 of them in British Shipbuilders — even if no further redundancies take place either in British Shipbuilders or in Harland and Wolff.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does the measure affect those formerly employed in the yards of British Shipbuilders who are now working for private companies?

Mr. Lamont: It does not affect them, because yards that have been privatised do not benefit from the scheme. A person who is already in receipt of benefits under the scheme will not be affected by the Bill. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured about that.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I wish to take the question a stage further. The Government intend to privatise some yards. What would be the fate of workers in yards which are now publicly owned and which become privately owned who may be made redundant? Would they qualify under the scheme?

Mr. Lamont: I shall obviously outline that in my speech.

The background to our decision about whether to extend the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme is thus one of the continuing risk of further rationalisation in merchant shipbuilding coupled with a huge reduction in the size of the state sector that will result from the transfer back of certain yards to the private sector.

In our view, it would be wrong in those circumstances to let the scheme lapse now. Since the last prolongation it has served well as a means of alleviating the distress of those made redundant and of enabling the corporation to achieve the inevitable contraction both smoothly and efficiently.

While there remains a need for further rationalisation and a real risk of further contraction of merchant shipbuilding, and while the complex and difficult process of privatising the warship yards is under way, it would be inequitable and inappropriate to remove the scheme. However, we do not propose prolongation because we, British Shipbuilders or Harland and Wolff have plans for further major redundancies in merchant shipbuilding. There are no such plans. But we cannot ignore the risk that further rationalisation will be necessary. It is against that contingency that we are proposing this extension today.

Nor do we expect preparation for privatisation to result in any further retrenchment in the warship yards. The recent job losses at Swan Hunter and Vospers were the result of a failure by those yards to achieve merchant or export orders—an essential complement to the base load of work for the Royal Navy. The impetus to efficiency that will result from the return to the private sector promises in the longer term to generate jobs rather than to lose them. We believe that the scheme should be prolonged, but at the same time we do not believe that it should be prolonged indefinitely.

The scheme applies only to the state sector. Like all statutory schemes, it is inevitably more costly to administer than company-based arrangements.

When the state owned most of the industry and a long period of massive retrenchment lay ahead, statutory

[Mr. Lamont]

redundancy payment schemes made practical sense. By the end of 1986 the state will own less than one third of the United Kingdom industry. Moreover, if it is to survive, the remaining merchant shipbuilding sector will by then have had to fight its way back to a competitive position and to have found a level of reasonable stability. The need and justification for the scheme will thus have passed. We have concluded that it should be extended only this one, last, time to the end of 1986. I cannot tell the House what the cost of the scheme will be, because the cost of extending it will depend on the redundancies that take place. As a guide to what might happen and to indicate the "ball park" area, the cost of the scheme in 1983-84, when there were 7,000 redundancies—that is vastly in excess of what is likely to happen in the much smaller state-owned merchant sector—was £34 million. That covered both some payments for that year's redundancies and some payments to people made redundant in previous years.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): It is significant that the Minister said that there would be no redundancy provisions after 1986. Presumably there will still be a British Shipbuilders in operation, building merchant ships, whatever happens to the Government's privatisation proposals. Is not the Minister in effect saying that workers who do not accept redundancy from British Shipbuilders before the end of 1986 will not receive redundancy payments? Is he not therefore placing a threat on them to complete redundancy schemes before the end of 1986?

Mr. Lamont: Obviously, I am coming to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point which the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) also raised. I shall deal with what will happen to the yards that are privatised and with what will happen in the remaining state sector after 1986. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will let me finish my remarks, I shall address both questions.

The Northern Ireland scheme covering Harland and Wolff has always run parallel to and on the same basis as that for British Shipbuilders. It would, therefore, make sense to maintain it for the same period of 18 months. The Bill does that. There will naturally be anxiety about what will follow the schemes. The management of British Shipbuilders, Harland and Wolff and their work forces must resolve that matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I propose to ask both organisations, in consultation with their unions, to establish appropriate successor schemes by the early autumn of 1986. It is too early to predict the details of such schemes. They will be negotiated between the management and work force, just as in the private sector. However, at this stage there is no need to worry that the work forces may end up worse off.

I recognise that there has always been anxiety that it is inequitable for the scheme to be available to the public but not to the private sector. Those with the interests of the present private sector in mind may argue either that the scheme should be extended to the whole industry or should be abolished now. I am quite clear that an extension to the private sector would be the wrong solution. A statutory scheme for the entire shipbuilding industry would be expensive, bureaucratic and wrong in principle. Employees of the warship yards will not be able to claim under this scheme after those yards join the private sector. They may be assimilated into an existing scheme, if one is already provided by the new owners, or a new scheme may be established as a result of negotiations between the new owners and the work force at the time of privatisation.

The reverse argument—that the scheme should go now—has been put forcibly by, among others, the Shipbuilders and Ship-repairers' Independent Association. I ask hon. Members who take that view to accept the Government's judgment that the interests of shipbuilding and of its work force are best served by a limited prolongation through the contribution that it will continue to make in the management of any contraction in the state sector.

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I know that the Government's policy is to keep their hands away from manufacturing industry, but will the Minister intervene to encourage the unions and management to reach redundancy agreements similar to those that we are talking about now?

Mr. Lamont: I can give no such commitment. I shall ask the management of British Shipbuilders to negotiate a scheme. Equally, for the privatised yards, it will be for the unions and managements to negotiate agreements. It would be wrong for the Government to lay down conditions or to say what the benefits of any scheme should be.

On that basis, I commend this final extension of the scheme to the House as a sensible contribution to our support for the shipbuilding industry.

Clause 2 writes off the outstanding irrecoverable loans made between 1968 and 1972 by the Shipbuilding Industry Board to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Ltd.—a company now in liquidation—and reduces the assets of the National Loans Fund accordingly. In the "Accounts relating to issues from the National Loan Funds" for 1982-83, published on 12 December 1983 and presented to Parliament, it was stated that parliamentary approval to write off those loans would be sought in the financial year 1983-84. No suitable opportunity arose in that year. This Bill is the first suitable vehicle affording such an opportunity. That is all that I need to say about clause 2.

I commend the Bill to the House.

4.12 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The Minister presented the Bill as a small technical operation designed simply to extend the redundancy payments scheme for a further 18 months beyond the period already sanctioned by Parliament. However, towards the end of his speech, as he explained the implications of the Bill, it became clear to me and to my right hon. and hon. Friends that something much more important was afoot. The Minister said that the Government had no intention of prolonging the redundancy payments scheme beyond the end of 1986 and that they do not propose to have similar schemes for the yards that are privatised as a result of the Government's privatisation policy.

The Minister would think us naive if we did not immediately ask him some searching questions on the implications of the Government's decision not to continue the scheme beyond 1986 and not to seek similar schemes in the private sector. What will happen to workers, as we near the end of 1986, who fear that they might become redundant in 1987? The Minister says to those workers, "You need not worry. You will be no worse off because

I hope that a scheme will have been negotiated between British Shipbuilders and its work force that will give you redundancy protection." If the scheme has to be negotiated, how can the Minister say that the workers will be no worse off? The negotiated scheme could be considerably worse than the present scheme, in which case the workers would be worse off.

The Minister cannot say that the workers will be no worse off unless he gives us a guarantee today that he will insist that any negotiated redundancy payment scheme is no worse than the scheme currently available. He signally failed to do that. I hope that before the end of the debate the Minister or the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will make the Government's position clear. For the purposes of our debate at present, it seems clear that the Government will not insist on similar schemes and that the Minister's statement that the workers will be no worse off is meaningless and has no validity.

The second crucial aspect is that workers in the private sector, and workers in enterprises that will be sold over their heads to the private sector, will have worse redundancy protection than will the workers who remain in British Shipbuilders. That is undeniable. That factor will affect the thinking of the workers in the industry as they see their conditions of work worsening materially as a result of the Government's privatisation policy.

Another and perhaps more sinister aspect arises from that. What will be the view of workers who are considering their futures in the period before privatisation? Might they be tempted to say, "It would be wise to apply for redundancy before the yard is privatised so that I can have the rights under the existing scheme. If I do not apply for redundancy before privatisation, I will lose my rights after the yard is privatised." An elderly worker who has spent all his working life in the shipbuilding industry—as is not untypical in most shipyards—will be tempted to apply for redundancy which he might not want and which it might not be in the interests of the company to give him. However, the temptation will be such that he will take redundancy to ensure that he receives as much compensation as is available at present, bearing in mind the possibility that he might get no compensation after privatisation.

Is that not a way of reducing the work force immediately before privatisation, with the bill for redundancy being paid by the taxpayer so that the new private owner takes over a much smaller work force and has no obligation to pay the social costs of the changes in the industry? An extremely devious proposal is being put forward under the apparently innocent and generous terms of the Bill.

I am surprised that the Minister has not interrupted me while I have been making those allegations to say that I am wrong. I suspect that I am right about those facts, and the Minister is silent because my allegations are true. That will cause anxiety throughout the shipbuilding industry for those who will remain in the public sector and even more so for those who will be affected by the Government's privatisation proposals. It is a new twist to the saga of privatisation that was not revealed until the Minister made those remarks towards the end of his speech introducing this apparently innocent Bill. No doubt those features of the proposals will command most of our attention during the debate, and I am sure that my hon. Friends will wish to ask some searching questions.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not true to say that this is an entirely new development. When parts of British Shipbuilders were privatised—this is what happened with Tyne Shiprepair Group Ltd. and Scott Lithgow—workers lost their entitlement under the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme. Compensation for that was the subject of negotiation. The state scheme applies to the state sector. It would be inappropriate for smaller state sector, employing 11,000 people in British Shipbuilders, to have the full panoply of the state scheme. That is simple common sense.

Mr. Smith: The Minister has put none of my fears at rest. I am not sure what happened with the other privatised yards, but my hon. Friends assure me that it was not quite as the Minister described it. Compensation was given to those workers in respect of the loss of their prospective redundancy payments. I do not know whether that is proposed in the case of the privatised yards. Is the Minister saying that at Yarrows, which appears to be the first candidate for privatisation, compensation will be paid to the workers for the loss of prospective redundancy payment rights under the present scheme? If not, why not?

If the Minister rests his case by saying that he is doing nothing different from what happened with the privatisation of the Scott Lithgow yard and compensation was given to those workers, why does he not offer compensation to the workers at Yarrows, who will lose the right to participate in the present scheme? The answer is that he will not do that. Those workers will lose out. The parallel drawn by the Minister is extremely inept. He has chosen a boomerang as a weapon.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Is it not true that the workers in Tyne Shiprepairers were each given £2,100 as a lump sum payment to come out of the shipbuilding redundancy scheme? What the Minister says is not true. It is misleading the House to say that this has happened previously, because the workers in Tyne Shiprepairers were bought out of the redundancy scheme.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose deep knowledge of the shipbuilding industry is yet again of great value to the House. That is a very good example of how the Minister was seeking to lay a false trail across our path with his reference to previous privatisation exercises.

As a result of what my hon. Friend said, it is an odd state of affairs that some people were compensated for their loss of rights when they left British Shipbuilders, but that those who stay in British Shipbuilders after 1986 will lose rights in respect of which they will get no compensation. Their reward for staying in the state corporation is that they will lose rights. The Government's approach is thoroughly unsatisfactory and will cause a great deal of fear and worry throughout the shipbuilding communities.

At the end of the day, it worries me most of all that it will be said to workers in yards which are to be privatised that they ought to leave soon so that they will get the benefit of redundancy pay, and that will obviously be of advantage to the incoming privatiser, because he will take over a much smaller work force, with no social obligations. Once again the taxpayer will have to foot the bill for social change, while the very large profits likely

[Mr. Smith]

to be made in the warship yards will go to private sector employers who will take them over, perhaps at knockdown prices, with almost no social responsibilities.

This is a much more significant Bill as a result of what the Minister said in his closing remarks than appeared on a first reading of it. To the extent that the Minister has revealed the Government's devious intentions, I suppose that we ought to be grateful to him because we are now forewarned about what is to happen.

The reason why we have to discuss redundancies at all is the crisis in the shipbuilding industry. We debated this on 27 November last year, in official Opposition time, when we drew attention to the deepening crisis in the industry. There has been very little improvement since then, and the worry in the industry is growing.

I had the opportunity just before Christmas to take part in a conference of shipbuilding workers in Newcastle, organised by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, representing nearly all the workers in the shipbuilding industry in Tyne and Wear. I was left in no doubt about the very substantial worries and fears in the industry amongst the work force, many of whom have given most of their lives to that industry. They are acutely aware of the problem which Sir Robert Atkinson mentioned in a speech only a few months ago, which is that the real worry and fear in the shipbuilding industry, particularly on the merchant shipping side, is that one yard will close after another. The more that one listens to the Government's plans, the more it becomes clear that they are unconcerned about whether one yard closes after another.

The fact that the former chairman, Sir Robert Atkinson, speaks in those terms is extremely interesting. He can hardly be accused of being a Labour sympathiser. He has described himself as a great admirer of the Prime Minister, but he said that it broke his heart to see what had been done to the shipbuilding industry in recent years. We know that the crisis has deepened significantly over the last two or three years, and not just as a result of the decline in orders internationally.

The Minister will be acutely aware of perhaps the most significant comment by Sir Robert Atkinson. He said that during his period in charge of British Shipbuilders he was never asked by Ministers about research and development and about the future of the industry. He added:

"But if I talked about closures or redundancies, their eyes shone."

That is the former chairman of British Shipbuilders talking about the Government's attitude to the vitally important shipbuilding industry, and I repeat it because it is worth listening to again:

"But if I talked about closures or redundancies, their eyes shone."

Presumably the Minister of State was one of those whose eyes shone on these occasions.

Sir Robert went on to describe the Government's privatisation policy as "political dogma." He said:

"The Government wants rid of British Shipbuilders."

Given that context of Government policy, it is no surprise that we have had more redundancies recently, and it looks as though there may be more in train. What the Minister said today about the redundancy terms of the Bill makes us worry that, either by inducement or by fear, there will be the acceleration of a large number or redundancies in the yards which are about to be privatised.

I hope that the Government will think carefully about the terms of the Bill. I hope that they will think carefully about the foolish decision not to extend the redundancy scheme beyond 1986. They ought to think carefully about having a fair relationship between those in the privatised sector and those remaining in the public sector so that, as far as can be achieved, justice is done, and on the same basis, to everyone who works in the shipbuilding industry.

Even more important than that, there must be a real effort to try to save the shipbuilding industry. It is not just an ordinary industry to be looked at from the point of view that some industries rise and other industries fall and that we have to accept that almost as we accept the fates. The shipbuilding industry is extremely important to the United Kingdom because of its close connection with the shipping industry, which itself is a crucial industry, for vital reasons of trade and defence.

No maritime nation such as Britain can be without a proper shipping industry. As was made clear in a recent debate, we know the worry and concern in all parts of the House about the decline of our shipping industry, which is running down at the rate of about two ships a week. From having one of the largest merchant shipping fleets in the world, Britain is rapidly slipping down the league table to the point where it will probably be impossible for us again to mount a merchant shipping back-up for a military expedition such as the Falklands.

It is also crucial for a country which depends on trade for so much of its national wealth to have an adequate shipping facility, because for the foreseeable future most of our trade will be carried by sea.

It is therefore crucial to have a shipbuilding industry to back up that shipping industry. I recommend to the Government once again the idea of a national maritime strategy, which has been urged not just from the Opposition Benches but from all parts of the House, whereby the Government decide that there must be a real incentive to maintain a British shipping industry and that in turn there must be real incentives not only for ships to be ordered but for ships to be built in British shipyards.

The Japanese shipbuilding industry was rescued by a large order by the Sanko shipping company of Japan. Despite the fact that a one third price discount is available to Japanese shippers if they buy their ships from Korean yards, not one Japanese shipping company has put an order outwith Japan. I wish that we could say the same about the British shipping industry.

Whatever the attitudes of British shippers, they should be given the maximum incentive, and the disincentives introduced in the 1984 Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are having a bad effect. I hope that in 1985 the Chancellor will rethink his position so that we start having fiscal as well as other policies which will support a national maritime strategy.

I hope, too, that the Government will end this folly of privatisation. We saw another evil aspect of privatisation revealed in the Minister's speech. Let me remind the House about what is proposed. The most profitable section of British Shipbuilders, the part of the industry which is almost the pensioner of the Government because it fulfills only Government orders and operates generally on a cost-plus basis — that jewel in the crown from the profitability point of view — is to be sold off to the private sector, apparently with as few obligations attached to it as possible. The rest of British Shipbuilders has to survive as it may without the help of any cost subsidy from

the profitable section. We shall be left with beleaguered merchant shipping yards open to the fierce winds of competition, and they may very well close one after another. We shall be left with a warship building capability dependent on Ministry of Defence orders and a merchant shipbuilding industry which may have almost vanished. In those circumstances, to hand over those assets and to allow the others to wither, or for there to be an obligation for the others to be picked up by the state, is nothing short of ludicrous folly.

The extension of the period of tender seems to have resulted in industrial bloodhounds sniffing around those yards which are to be privatised, looking for some easy pickings. We know from experience that some British companies are adept at seeing what can be got from declining industries at the cheapest possible price. They then start new and profitable businesses out of investment which was made previously by the public sector in businesses which are available to them at knockdown prices. I hope that the Government will take great care to avoid that. I am told that there are already considerable fears among, for example, the work force at Yarrows over the number of bidders that there may be for that yard. Yarrows and Hall Russell appear to be the first in the privatisation stakes.

Finally, let me make a special plea to the Government to deal with the consequences of redundancies in the shipbuilding areas in a more imaginative way than simply by continuing, even for a limited period, the redundancy payments scheme. In many industries the Government are under the illusion that it is sufficient to compensate people for the loss of their individual jobs. They fail to understand that, although the individual may be compensated for his redundancy, the job is lost for ever to the community. It is not enough in the mining industry, the shipbuilding industry, the steel industry or any of our heavy industries where redundancies have occurred to think that the book can be closed from a social point of view when a certain amount of money has been paid to a person who has been made redundant. The community in which that person lives and his descendants will have lost the opportunity of employment.

In part of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), about 49 per cent. of those on the unemployed register are skilled workers. That must be a unique situation in the United Kingdom. We know the loss that that community has suffered. Will the Government consider giving special help to those areas affected by the rundown of the shipbuilding industry? I am sure that the situation that I have described in Newcastle can be found in other areas where there has been a heavy concentration of shipbuilding.

It is folly at this time to devalue the regional policy instruments which were previously available to such areas. Under regional policy changes there has been the abolition of the special development area incentives. When one cuts through all the waffle of the Government's statement, that is the most important change, apart from the cutback in the amount of money committed to regional development.

I hope that in the near future we shall have an opportunity to debate these matters at great length. I merely say now that of all the times to take such steps in areas affected by the rundown of shipbuilding, this seems to be the most stupid. Therefore, I ask the Government to consider providing some special help for those areas. This has been achieved in other industries; for example, by British Steel Corporation industries, and such provisions have been talked about for the coal mining industry. I do not know whether it will be suitable to give such help under the aegis of British Shipbuilders, or whether it should be given by some other Government task force mechanism, but I hope that the Government will give serious consideration to a special regime which can be introduced into those shipbuilding areas which have experienced redundancies so that communities, as well as individuals, receive some assistance. It is not good enough to look at the matter in terms of individuals. We must think of the individuals who have yet to come and others dependent on the industries in the community.

The rundown in some parts of the shipbuilding industry in Britain has been savage and severe. It has been as savage and severe as anything that has been suffered in any other part of the country by any other industry. Other areas and industries have received special help and I can see no good reason why the shipbuilding areas should not do so as well. Instead of bringing the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme to an end in 1986, I hope that the Government will think more seriously about much more imaginative measures, such as those that I have suggested.

We cannot accept the Minister's speech today with complacency or with a feeling of satisfaction. He has raised many serious fears and he will have to come to the Dispatch Box a few more times before those fears are finally relieved.

4.34 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I wish to intervene briefly on a modest and useful little Bill. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) went wide, as he is entitled to do on Second Reading, and I am tempted to follow him further. However, I have spoken in previous debates on shipping and shipbuilding and I shall not, immediately after Christmas in our first debate of the new year, break a rule that I have set myself to be extremely modest in my contributions in the House. I know that one can tax the patience of one's colleagues beyond endurance, so I shall be brief.

My hon. Friend the Minister did not go far enough in his comments on clause 1. What is his timetable for the privatisation of the warship builders? I declare a constituency interest because I have one such yard in my constituency. I have received a clear message, from both the management and the work force—if the yard is to be privatised, for heaven's sake get on with it. I think that both sides of the House will agree that the worst position is to be in a state of limbo, both from the point of view of a yard's customers and the obtaining of orders, and also from the point of view of morale within a yard. Therefore, if our local yard of Vosper Thornycroft is to be sold, as I gather it is, for heaven's sake get on with it and tell us when it is to be sold and on what terms. I know that the Labour party disagrees with the Government's policy, but, given that it is the policy, I think that even the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will agree that there is a great advantage in speed in the despatch of such matters.

I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, coming from the part of the country that he does, has an interest in Yarrows, as a lead warship yard. He will agree that the degree to which compensation to redundant workers will be necessary in the warship yards depends on

[Sir David Price]

the extent to which the Ministry of Defence places orders. I and the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) have time and again raised in the House the question of the type 22 frigates. That is not even a Treasury matter. The Ministry of Defence does not have to extract money from the Treasury. It has been in all the estimates. But when will orders be placed for the two type 22 frigates for which the hon. Member for Birkenhead and myself are waiting? The delay has gone on for 15 months.

That raises the wider issue. Can we not get out of the Ministry of Defence an agreement that there should be a programme of future naval ordering that is generally known within the industry? It does not mean that it need commit itself on every order to a particular yard because it can be argued that if such a commitment were made years ahead a yard would go soft, and so on. One knows the arguments. But, given the five-year programming of Government investment — we have an annual White Paper on that—I see no reason why there cannot be a five-year programme for naval ordering by the Ministry of Defence.

That does not seem to raise any ideological issues; it just means prudent forward thinking. The House will notice that I forbear to use the word "planning". It may be unacceptable to some of my right hon. Friends. I simply use the words "forward thinking". I see no reason why that cannot be done. All the evidence from such relations as I have with the armed services is that that would be acceptable to the Ministry of Defence at the operating level. That again would assist us on the issue of the labour force within the remaining warship building yards. I offer it as a positive proposition upon which I see no reason why there should be any disagreement in the House.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who will reply to the debate is a supplicant in this, because, of course, the Ministry of Defence is the relevant ordering Department. Indeed, I notice that no one from that Department is present. But why cannot the Ministry of Defence have an even naval ordering programme? Some years ago a White Paper—I cannot remember which—agreed with that theory. However, in practice there is no such even ordering. We always hear that great phrase "the lessons of the Falklands". Those lessons were to be written into every new naval order, but in practice they have led to few orders.

The Ministry of Defence is very complex, and perhaps those involved are unable to agree among themselves, but I cannot see why we cannot have a proper annual ordering programme. We should all tell the Ministry that we must have an annual ordering programme that is given at least three years ahead, and preferably five years ahead. I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is no longer in the Chamber, as he suggested that there were easy profits to be made by the warship yards out of the Ministry of Defence. If that is so, that is a problem for the Ministry. But the difficulty of the warship yards is that they have a near-monopoly buyer —the Ministry of Defence.

It is often said that the way out for warship yards is export orders, but most of us with any experience of defence ordering know that it is very difficult to sell defence equipment abroad—whether for navy, air force or army — unless our own forces are buying it. Therefore, unless a naval warship builder obtains an order, particularly a first-of-type order from the Ministry, it will find it very difficult to persuade any foreign buyer, however admirable the proposition may be on paper, to place an order in practice.

The Ministry of Defence may tell a yard, "I am sorry that we are taking so long to make up our minds, but I hope that you will understand our difficulties. You go off and find an export order." But that is not good enough, because the yard will not obtain an export order if it is known that the Ministry is not placing an order. That point must be generally accepted, and relates to clause 1 and the number of redundancies likely on the warship building side.

I have spoken in the House before about the Merchant Navy, and, as the House knows, I am not in entire agreement with the Government. I have some sympathy for what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said about a more general maritime policy. A maritime policy as such almost sounds too particular, and slightly pompous, to some of us. However, we must look across the board and consider the effect of one decision upon another in different Departments and sectors of the economy. To that extent, I am of course in favour of a maritime policy, but I would not put it quite as grandly as the right hon. and learned Gentleman did. But that is why I sit below rather than above the Gangway.

Dr. Godman: Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said about the need for the enactment of a maritime policy, has not the time come for setting up a Royal Commission to examine the shipbuilding, shipping and maritime service industries?

Sir David Price: I have great sympathy with the motive behind the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I prefer the House to Royal Commissions. It is an old-fashioned prejudice of mine. I have been here for 30 years and still think that the House is a better instrument than a Royal Commission. But then, I am very old-fashioned in these matters and I do not think that we can duck problems by passing them to Royal Commissions. We should deal with them here in the House. We are perfectly capable of doing so. Incidentally, I am a great supporter of Select Committees. In the last Parliament, I won third place in the ballot for private Member's Bills and tried to implement a proposal of a Select Committee, of which I was not a member, on the flexibility of pensions.

I believe that we should make the House of Commons work. We run ourselves down, but I believe that we are capable of doing much more and of having much more influence on Government than at present. Thus, although I am sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's question, he should talk about not Royal Commissions but the House.

I may disagree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East because I believe that the shipbuilding industry is one of our old industries and that it is on the way down. I do not think that it will be eliminated, but the question is at what point it bottoms out and begins to take off again. For those involved, there are three priorities. First, I should like to see earlier retirement. That was the object of a Bill that I tried to promote during the last Session. Unless the state old-age pension is made more flexible, it will be harder for industrial redundancy schemes to accommodate earlier retirement. The basis of the approach to pensions on the part of Governments of both parties has been that retirement income has two elements: the state old-age

pension and the occupational pension. Men suffer particularly because they do not receive their old-age pensions until they are 65, whereas women do so at 60. The lack of equality between the sexes is offensive. There is a strong case for earlier retirement in the old heavy industries, but we must get the retirement terms right. Given the conditions in which people used to work and sometimes still do work in the shipbuilding industry, it is only right to draw attention to that point.

Secondly, there is a case for job sharing between older workers. We have not begun to put our minds to that whole new area. But one social reaction to the second industrial revolution must be a degree of job sharing. Thirdly, I always believe in generous redundancy terms. In the long run, that is not only socially right but cheap at the price.

I noticed that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East paid little attention to a point relating to clause 2. In 1967 there was a debate about putting public money into Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. I was then sitting where the right hon. and learned Gentleman now sits, on the Opposition Front Bench, and I remember that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who was then Minister of Technology, had shipbuilding within his brief. At the time, I criticised the choice of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, but not the principle. It was not wrong at that time to put public money into British shipbuilding and, indeed, into Scottish shipbuilding, but the choice of the upper rather than the lower Clyde was wrong. We should have gone for the lower Clyde and for building a brand new closed yard, under cover, so that the workers were not exposed to the weather. It could have been built on the lines of the Swedish and Japanese yards, but that did not happen. The lesson to be drawn from the demise of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders is not that in principle it is always wrong to put public money into industry, but that the recipient of that investment should be chosen very carefully and in relation not to industrial history but to one's judgment about future trends in technology and markets.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East spoke about the desirability of cross-subsidisation between merchant and warship yards. That is a highly questionable proposition. Accountancy as between one yard and another in a large organisation or in any great industrial empire is not that precise. There is also a clear distinction between the two types of yard. It could well prejudice naval ordering and the future of the naval yards if they were to cross-subsidise the merchant yards.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke about the loss of jobs and was concerned not only that those who lost their jobs should be compensated but that the areas in which they lived should be compensated, too. In principle, we can all see the social consequences of the closure of a yard. As the House knows, at one time I was the Minister who had to deal with regional development. In principle, of course, one cared passionately about the strategy, although how far any of us got the tactics right is questionable.

I offer the House this thought. In the old Board of Trade, where I was dealing with these matters, we were running a tight control on industrial development and had incentives to attract industry to favoured areas. It is arguable whether we achieved much. What came out clearly was that investment in transportation and in the public infrastructure was a great deal more important than trying to put pressure on individual firms to go or not to go where we in Government wanted.

My answer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that I accept strategically the point he has made but I do not believe that it is most effectively achieved tactically by direct Government intervention in individual firms. To put our money and the public's money into the investment infrastructure is better than to put it into specific projects. I leave that thought with the House.

4.51 pm

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) always makes an interesting and thoughtful contribution to our shipbuilding debates and his speeches are always made out of genuine concern for the shipbuilding industry, a concern which is not, unfortunately, shared on the Government side of the House. I agree with some things that he said, particularly about the naval ordering programme, but on other matters I disagree with him. As I am a Member representing one of the shipyards on the upper Clyde, the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to agree with what he said about the upper Clyde. I do not wish to debate some of the points he made; rather I should like to deal with the Bill.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said, redundancy is not a cause for rejoicing even when there are generous redundancy payments. There is a tendency on the part of the Government to consider it a great victory when, as they would say, workers are queueing up for redundancy in a shipyard or a factory. I consider that a defeat not only for the shipyard or the factory and the locality but for the whole of manufacturing industry. Therefore, it is not a sufficient response to the problems of the shipbuilding industry to provide for adequate or even generous redundancy terms.

If there is to be redundancy—unfortunately, we have suffered a good deal of redundancy in the shipbuilding industry in the past year — it is important that the redundancy arrangements should be adequate and, indeed, generous. I do not believe that the statutory scheme for shipbuilding is generous compared with other schemes such as that for the steel industry and that now proposed for coal mining.

It is disturbing that even the statutory scheme for the shipbuilding industry is to be ended on 31 December 1986. There was absolutely no warning of this. The Bill was published only on 3 January during the Christmas recess. When we left for the recess we had no idea of what was in the Bill. The press notice put out with the Bill on 3 January gave us no information about the Bill and did not explain its implications which only became clear in some of the explanations that we had from the Minister of State this afternoon.

Like my hon. Friends, I am opposed to the ending of the scheme in December 1986. The Minister said that we should not worry because he was confident that before that date British Shipbuilders would be able to negotiate at least as favourable terms with the trade unions for the part of the industry that stays under British Shipbuilders; that is my understanding of the Minister's speech. If the terms for the remaining part of British Shipbuilders turn out to be at least as good as the present terms — the trade unions will accept nothing less—there is no purpose in stopping the scheme at the end of 1986 because the cost

[Mr. Bruce Millan]

to British Shipbuilders and, therefore, ultimately to the Government, the owner of British Shipbuilders, will be the same.

If the scheme is to continue in a non-statutory form for the remaining part of British Shipbuilders, there is no purpose in ending the statutory scheme. It would be much more sensible and would not cause the anxiety that undoubtedly the Minister's statement today will cause among the workers in the industry at the decision to end the scheme in December 1986.

An interesting question arises as to what happens to the bits of the industry that will be privatised. What the Minister said about that this afternoon is not accurate, as was pointed out in an intervention about Tyne Shiprepair. At the time of the privatisation of Tyne Shiprepair compensation was offered to the workers for the loss of their redundancy arrangements.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Compensation was negotiated as part of the sole arrangement. Compensation could be negotiated when the warship yards are privatised. Company schemes could be negotiated. Obviously, a state statutory scheme by definition does not extend to the private sector. When Scott Lithgow and Tyne Shiprepair were privatised, the entitlement to the statutory benefit was lost. Compensation was paid, not as a right but as a result of negotiation. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the position is analogous between the privatisation of warship yards in the future and the privatisations that have happened in the past. There is the possibility of negotiated compensation if there is no scheme.

Mr. Millan: I shall come in a moment to the further privatisation proposals about which I want information that we have not yet had from the Minister or any other source.

First, in regard to Scott Lithgow, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) may want to say more about that as the constituency Member if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In a written answer on 19 December, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry informed me that when Scott Lithgow was sold to Trafalgar House part of the contingent liability taken on by British Shipbuilders and, therefore, taken on by the Government, because they are the paymaster, was

"benefits, equivalent to the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme, to a maximum of 1,600 workers who might be made redundant within a year of the sale."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 252.]

In other words, the workers in Scott Lithgow were protected. Incidentally, they did not negotiate that. There was no trade union negotiation with Trafalgar House or anyone else. It was part of the deal that there was protection for a maximum of 1,600 workers under the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme for at least a year after the sale of Scott Lithgow in March 1983. The cost of redundancies at Scott Lithgow will be borne not by the new owners but by British Shipbuilders and, ultimately, by the Government. Redundancies costing £400,000 have already taken place. The new owners have not taken on responsibility for redundancies. The Government, through British Shipbuilders, have maintained that liability.

Trafalgar House did not pay for the yard in full. It was sold for much less than the asset value. We should like to know the details of the financial deal. The cost did not fall on the new owners of the yard. The Government and Trafalgar House negotiated the sale through British Shipbuilders.

Documents which represent offers for sale have already gone out in respect of Yarrow, Hall Russell and other yards which are due for privatisation. The documents have not been made public. Public assets are being sold on the basis of offers for sale which have not been made public. Even hon. Members cannot obtain copies of the offers for sale.

Mr. Norman Lamont: They are available.

Mr. Millan: If so, I should like to obtain copies. I hope that the Minister will send me copies of all the offers for all the yards that are to be privatised. I understand that the documents have not been made available publicly. I understand that interested parties hold the documents on the understanding that they will not disclose their contents to any other party, however genuine, including workers in the yards. Assets are to be sold and the workers are not to be told the contents of the offer for sale documents.

What do the documents say about redundancy obligations under the new ownership? Redundancy obligations will make a difference to the price that a genuine buyer might offer for a yard. Purchasers of the naval yards—we are opposed to the sale of such yards—who want a quiet life must take on an obligation to provide a redundancy payments scheme by agreement with the trade unions. If they do not, they will have a heck of a lot of difficulty with the trade unions.

The Government have always said that, whatever else happens when an industry is privatised, pension arrangements and conditions will not be adversely affected. Unless the new owners continue a similar redundancy scheme workers' conditions will be adversely affected. The new owners, whoever they are, will be foolish not to take on similar obligations.

Such obligations will influence the amount of money that a purchaser is likely to offer for a yard. The Government and the taxpayer will, therefore, foot the bill. For the Government to say that negotiations have nothing to do with them is misleading because the money will come from the public purse.

If privatisation goes ahead, despite our opposition, it must be on terms that are not detrimental to the workers. If the new owners do not accept such obligations workers will want to accept redundancy before privatisation while the present terms are still available. That is not a sensible way to run an industry, whether publicly or privately owned. In too many cases, people have been willing to accept redundancy, leading to the permanent loss of jobs for the community. In areas of high unemployment that is disastrous.

It is better to avoid redundancy. To do that we need more orders, for the merchant yards in particular. Has there been any progress in the negotiations within the European Community on the intervention fund? I refer to the Minister of State's remarks on 27 November 1984 during our last debate on shipbuilding. In column 838 of *Hansard* the Minister was full of good intentions. I accept that the Government want the scheme to operate more flexibly. At present, the scheme operates on an ad hoc basis, which is unsatisfactory. I hope that the Minister can say that progress has been made with our Common Market colleagues.

The Minister knows Govan Shipbuilders in my constituency because he has visited it. He has acknowledged in the House and elsewhere that it is an excellent yard with a good industrial relations record. The yard has a good productivity level and excellent management/trade union relationships. Co-operation there is positive and the yard's delivery record is excellent.

Even that yard is runninhg out of work. It is working on the three colliers for the CEGB. The contract has proceeded smoothly and the vessels are being completed. By the middle of this year the yard will run out of steel-associated work. In 1986 work will run down completely. Redundancies are inevitable unless additional orders are obtained.

The yard has an active and energetic managing director in Mr. Mackie who has been busy trying to obtain orders for the yard. Among the orders in which he is interested is one for five bulk carriers for a Turkish shipping company. The negotiations have received some publicity, which is not always helpful. The negotiations are well ahead, although I am not sure exactly how far they have progressed. The negotiations are important for Govan's future. The orders would be useful for the engine-building facility in the constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

I do not expect the Minister to go into detail this evening because negotiations are still in progress, but I hope that he will be able to say that he and his Department are fully aware of them and that they stand ready to give every possible assistance to Govan so that it obtains the order. Without it, even that yard with its record will have a troubled time in the next year or so. If that is true of Govan, it is also true of the merchant shipbuilding industry elsewhere in this country. Our general complaint is that the Government have not had the necessary commitment to that industry to enable it to survive in a difficult international situation.

On first reading, the Bill looked perfectly innocent and even desirable because it was extending the redundancy scheme for 18 months. Not untypically, it has turned out to have some disagreeable aspects, which is why, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East said, we shall want to explore several matters and obtain assurances and, I hope, amendments to the Bill before it reaches the statute book.

5.11 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Minister of State introduced the Bill as a technical measure, but it raises several issues, some of which have been touched on and some of which have not.

In shipbuilding debates, the Minister consistently seems to show a negative attitude towards shipbuilding and shipping. He gives the impression that he regards shipping and shipbuilding as a Victorian hangover that is in decline, and that inevitably we must accept the decline, whether in shipping or shipbuilding. So far we have heard the view of just one Conservative Back Bencher, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), but across and outside the House there is a feeling that the Government should say what they regard as the strategic level of shipbuilding and shipping that we should retain in the United Kingdom. If they do not, they will preside over the demise of this major industry. Many people are afraid that that is what is happening. I say this seriously and not in a combative way. In due course the Minister must show a more positive attitude towards the industry than he has on every occasion on which he has addressed the House on this subject.

Presumably the prime reason why, in the short run, we are extending the provision for redundancies is that we are expecting a great many more redundancies. Therefore, it is understandable that there is concern about the Government saying that there is a final date. Is it when they expect the industry to reach the minimum level of employment that will be retained as the strategic core? If the Government tell us that by the end of 1986 they are sure that the industry will have reached its minimum and will be looking for expansion thereafter, and that is the reason why they are not extending the scheme, we might have a little more confidence than we have now.

After all, the United Kingdom is an island nation and a trading nation. Surely it is a requirement that we have British-owned shipping capacity and indigenous ship-building capability. It would be ironic if we moved into the 21st century without having a significant stake in these two vital lifelines for this country. Regrettably, under this Government our trade has diminished and our export of manufactured goods is now in net deficit, but presumably we expect to go on trading as an island nation. Even the fact that more of our trade is in ferries does not give us a great deal of encouragement, because most of them are built in foreign yards, and although most of the ferry companies are British, increasingly there is an encroachment of foreign owners in this strategic lifeline.

One area which is not only of constituency interest to me but of strategic importance to the United Kingdom as a whole is the development of North sea oil. It is an offshore industry by definition, and the marine and maritime component of the industry is substantial. Britain's maritime technology should play a much bigger part in the development of the North sea than it does. Let me be more specific. At present we have a record number of drilling rigs operating in the North sea. Virtually all of them are foreign-owned and foreign-built. The exploration rigs and production platforms are serviced by a variety of offshore support and supply vessels, nearly all foreign-built, and a high proportion foreign-owned.

I wonder whether any other maritime nation like ourselves, with such an important growth industry which offers development opportunities of new technology out of our traditional capabilities, would tolerate such a high level of foreign operation in its territorial waters. I am sure that the Japanese would not. We know that the Americans do not. The Norwegians certainly do not. It is time that the Government had a policy which required that more of the ships that we need for United Kingdom purposes were built in United Kingdom yards.

The Government propose to privatise warship yards. I do not wish to repeat what has already been said, but in the last financial year those yards made a profit of £33 million, and any profit that they make is made because they secure orders from the British taxpayer. However, once they have been privatised, any profit that they make will go to the private owners and will not benefit the taxpayer. Therefore, at least £33 million will not be available for the benefit of the remainder of British shipbuilding. I am not suggesting that there will be no benefit, but, by definition, it will be a reduced benefit.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Therefore, it is difficult to see how privatisation will help the merchant yards that are left at the core of British Shipbuilders.

When he replies to the debate, the Under-Secretary should tell us what the Government's thinking is on the future of the merchant yards. I hope that it is positive, because many hon. Members fear that there will be no publicly owned shipyards and that the remaining yards will not be transferred to the private sector because the losses will not enable that to happen and the orders will not come, for the reasons that I have given. Therefore, we shall see the loss of valuable and strategically important yards in the British economy.

There is also concern about the implications of the redundancy scheme. We need to extend the scheme now, because the industry is contracting, but there will be a particular need to do so when a finite date is put on the eligibility for redundancy. It does not matter whether that date is when the scheme is due to end because the Government have said so, or whether it ends because the yard is transferred to the private sector, which may or may not have a comparable scheme.

There is an inevitable consequence that the individual working in the yard will say, "I had better take the money and run while I can." Some hon. Members may have noticed an article in *The Guardian* on Monday, which was entitled:

"Willing victims baffle unions".

Those are the thousands of shipyard workers in Swan Hunter who have applied for redundancy.

Mr. Garrett: The actual figure is 2,000.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

The report states that the company's industrial relations and personnel director, Mr. Denis Shadbolt,

"concedes that workers may be leaving the company while Swan Hunter remains part of state-owned British Shipbuilders rather than wait for inferior redundancy terms when the yards are privatised later this year."

There will be a problem not only for the individual but for the management, which is faced with the problem of who should be made redundant and which workers management cannot afford to lose. The Government must consider, if the yard is being privatised, whether there is a danger that good workers will be lost before privatisation and will not be available to the private owner thereafter. That may weaken the skill and strength of the work force within the yard.

The yard of Hall Russell is of interest to me and to the neighbouring constituency. It is likely to be among the first to be privatised in the present round. As the Minister is aware, I was part of a delegation which saw him some weeks ago. I subsequently had sight of the offer document. I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan). It would be helpful for Members to see what was involved in such a sale. The privatisation presents uncertainties. I am confident that Hall Russell has been a good yard. It has been profitable in public and private ownership, and there is no reason why it should not be successful as a private yard. One wonders, however, whether it benefits from being kicked in and out of the public sector as quickly as it has been.

The document states that the company had the advantage of British Shipbuilders' central services, for which it pays a management fee of £252,000. The prospectus confidently states that the cost of buying those services elsewhere is unlikely to exceed that amount. That may be a statement of faith. We must consider the cost of the management team pulling out of the services that it has developed during the past two years and having to find comparable services elsewhere. It is not just the economic cost; it is the cost in time and energy, which might be better directed towards winning orders and organising the yard's production.

Ultimately, the success of that yard and its ability to remain as a shipbuilding yard, which the Minister knows is the prime interest of the people of Aberdeen, who, in overwhelming numbers, have signed a petition asking that the yard be retained as a shipbuilding yard, will depend upon the Government ensuring that Ministry of Defence orders go to the yard, because they will be the core of its business. That will determine whether the yard is retained as a shipbuilding yard. The Minister has given assurances that he wishes to see that yard retained as a shipbuilding yard. I hope that he will speak to his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and let them know that he has given those assurances and that they should back him in that objective.

The idea that the yard might be taken over sooner or later by an interested party who might, for example, use it for offshore purposes might seem superficially attractive. It might employ a few more people, and it might be more profitable, but it would reduce the diverisity of employment and industry within the community. The north-east of Scotland has prided itself on remaining relatively problem-free, by economic and industrial diversity. We are not a one-industry area. It would be a disadvantage to us if the oil industry were to expand at the expense of the traditional industries, but it has already happened.

That is not to suggest that we are not grateful for and are not responding enthusiastically to the challenge of the oil industry, but it is why people feel that Hall Russell should be retained as a shipyard. It is also important in the national interest that we retain that strategic capability. Shipbuilding is extremely important for the people of the United Kingdom, both now and in the future.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Gentleman started his speech by castigating the Government for not identifying a core level of capacity that we could guarantee. He has now been speaking for 10 minutes. When will he tell us what his core level of capacity is? Is it 200,000 or 300,000 compensated gross registered tonnes? How will he guaranteee it?

Mr. Bruce: One would have thought that the Minister could tell the House what the Government's objective is. The hon. Gentleman has the advantage of a Department which should be working on the problem and coming up with the answers. He should be able to deliver the answers. We are going below the strategic level now, and if the decline over which the Minister has presided continues for the next year or two, it will be below the critical level.

I have identified for the Minister's benefit where we should be achieving greater United Kingdom penetration —specialised offshore vessels and ferry services to and from the United Kingdom. I should like the Minister to tell us what he and his Department are proposing to do to ensure that British shipyards obtain a higher proportion of

such orders. He cannot just talk in terms — as he is prone to do—of his ideological preference for the free market, because the Japanese, the South Koreans and the Americans operate a selective market. It is not to our advantage for Britain to operate a free market when the rest of the market is not free.

It is time that the Government told us what their bottom line is. At the moment, they are presiding over the dissolution of shipbuilding. It is a demoralised industry. The Government should return to the House with some positive ideas of how they will retain capacity and what that strategic capacity should be. I have identified matters to which the Government should address themselves. I and other Members would be more confident if the Government showed any inclination to do so.

5.25 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): When we came to take part in the debate today, the picture was depressing. Those of us who were thinking about the points we wanted to make if we were lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wished that we did not have to talk about redundancy schemes but rather about orders and saving the industry.

I agree with my hon. Friends who have already spoken, who said that the revelation contained in the Minister's speech that there would be no Government scheme after the end of 1986 confirms what we were sure about already. I hope that it confirms for others in the north-east and in shipbuilding communities, who had any doubts, that the Government are planning systematically to close down the rest of the state shipbuilding industry.

The Government are not just privatising warship yards; they are closing or privatising merchant yards. For anyone left in the industry, in Sunderland Shipbuilders or Austin and Pickersgill in my constituency, the message clearly is, "If any of you had any illusions or hopes that the Government were eventually going to do something to produce orders and save those yards, give up and get out now, because there will be no redundancy scheme left worth talking about by the end of next year."

In the light of what the Minister said, it is relevant to talk, as some of my hon. Friends have done, about the general position of the industry. We had a debate not long before Christmas, when various points were made. We received inadequate answers and explanations from the Government. The position has not improved. As the weeks go by it becomes worse. Austin and Pickersgill still has no orders. The Government still have not decided what to do about the export credit for the Ethiopian order, despite pleas from the Opposition Front Bench and by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier) and myself in the previous debate, and despite all the correspondence. Nothing has been done about that, and nothing has been done about the St. Helena order.

Mr. Parker is off around the world once again saying that he is looking for orders for SD14s. We are always being told that orders are about to materialise for them, but they never do. Redundancies have been announced for 21 January and more redundancies will follow in March. Realistically, unless an order turns up within a limited number of days, there will not just be further redundancies in March, but a closure in March or April. There is nothing left for the yard to do; it is out of work.

The Minister and the Government have for months been castigating hon. Members like myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) for being alarmist and putting around scare stories. It was hypocritical of the Government to point the finger at me and my hon. Friend when they were cynically preparing for the yard to close. They did not need to produce contingency plans relating to the closure of the yard. All they had to do was sit there and not provide any assistance. We know that there is a recession and that the industry faces problems, yet, as has been said time and time again on this side of the House, whenever there is the possibility of an order which British Shipbuilders is trying to obtain in competition with other shipbuilding nations it slips away.

During the last year there has been a list of possible orders for Austin and Pickersgill. Each one has slipped away. The Orlendorf order slipped away for a price gap of £2 million. The Government could have stepped in and done something about it. They could have provided a direct subsidy or an improved financial package. That order for two or three ships, which would have given the yard a breathing space, was allowed to slip away. The Ethiopian order is being allowed to slip away. Every other order is being allowed to slip away. The more that these orders appear, only for other countries to obtain them, the more I am convinced that the problem is not that there are no orders to be gained but that the Government do not have the will to assist British Shipbuilders and individual yards to gain those orders.

Could the Minister comment on the suggestion made to me that the Indonesian Government are planning over the next 10 years to renew their inter-island fleet and that, in the not-too-distant future, the Indonesian Government will begin to negotiate contracts for a total of 280 merchant ships? The Sanko order in Japan, which was referred to earlier by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), was a staggering example of how Governments can intervene to assist their own industries. I wonder whether it is true — I understand that it is — that the Indonesians intend to bring about this massive renewal. We are talking about hundreds of ships. Does the Minister intend to leave it to the Koreans, the Chinese and perhaps the Japanese to pick up those massive orders, or does he believe that the shipbuilding industry of this country should try to obtain part of that work?

Unless the Government say very soon that they are prepared to act quite differently to assist merchant yards to obtain the available orders, nobody should be in any doubt that the intention of the Government is to bring about the systematic rundown of British Shipbuilders. Its former chairman, Sir Robert Atkinson, has consistently accused the Government of this. It is also the view of nearly everybody who is associated with the shipbuilding industry, apart from those who sit on the Government Front Bench.

The Government need to take action to convince us that this is not their intention. Why does the Minister not come clean and be honest about it? Why does he not put an end to the agonising in the shipbuilding communities and announce that this is the Government's intention? Then we shall know what to do about it.

An even more desperately urgent matter which involves the many people who have already been made redundant and those who face redundancy is British Shipbuilders' engineering and technical services which are situated in my constituency. It is a classic example of the

[Mr. Bob Clay]

hopelessness, the pessimism and the wilful vandalism of Government policy. The general view of large parts of the international marine engineering industry was that it was a crazy decision to put an end to the development and manufacture of Doxford engines. This decision was categorically denied month in and month out by the Government, British Shipbuilders and everybody else until shortly before the manufacture of Doxford engines came to an end. But at least the facility was there for research and development, there was the capacity for spares and other engineering work and there was the hope that eventually it might be the basis for the rebirth of marine engineering on Wearside, where the Doxford engine at one time dominated the marine engineering industry.

The former chairman had faith in the industry and wanted to do something about it. There was investment in the industry but now British Shipbuilders, for the most absurd logic, it seems to me, has decided to close it. That announcement was made some time ago. During recent months anybody who has any interest in the industry has rallied round and tried to persuade the Government to change their mind. All kinds of people believe that there is a potential for this engineering industry. The "United Kingdom Marine Engineering Audit" — not a Labour party body publication but issued by the Institute of Marine Engineers—states:

"Although manufacture of engines ceased at Doxford Engines Limited in 1980, their design of opposed piston engines is a strong contender for the ships being ordered today and in the future; work on this has reached a relatively advanced stage at BS(ETS) Limited, a subsidiary of British Shipbuilders, which could be integrated into the project."

The project referred to is a major marine engineering project, a total propulsion machinery system.

"The engine design would be based on existing expertise and such a project could lead to an upgrading of the marine engineering capability in the UK. . . . The participants for such a project should include: shipowners, shipbuilders, classification societies, the Departments of Trade, Industry and Transport, engine and equipment manufacturers, professional institutes, polytechnics and universities. They would all be expected to contribute to the project financially or in kind. . .

A company, with directors drawn from the industry and universities, should control, plan and monitor the project which, ideally, should be located adjacent to a shipbuilding centre and a university."

There is no place that better fits that job description than the existing BS(ETS) facility in Sunderland. Any intelligent Government with a commitment to the industry would ask that those proposals ought to be developed and that money ought to be put into them. Indeed, the Government would be putting money into those proposals. Instead, the Government have stood aside and allowed the closure to take place. They have allowed the work force to be bludgeoned bit by bit by British Shipbuilders by threats, by cajoling, by bribes into volunteering for redundancy to the extent that now only 30 or so brave manual workers are determined to try to keep that engine works going, despite the determination of the Government and British Shipbuilders to close it. *Lloyd's List*, which is not a Socialist publication, carried an article on 3 January which referred to BS(ETS) and concluded:

"Even now, as Members of Parliament and local authorities concerned with reviving employment on the river Tyne and Wear are fighting to retain or revive Doxford engine prospects, it seems that the engine and its development team will be moved out of Sunderland. The logic of successive British Shipbuilders' heads continues to be difficult to comprehend. Even as the engine was being prematurely buried, Canada and other countries were desperately seeking elusive BS executives in the hopes of placing further engine orders. A number of those responsible for abandoning the engine have now left BS with sadly tarnished reputations".

I suspect that the Minister of State, the management and the chairman of British Shipbuilders, who are determined to kill the engineering works, will also end up with tarnished reputations.

Nothing can be done in a few days or a few weeks, but companies have said that they would be interested in taking over the works if BS were not willing to keep it open. Companies are talking about developing the engine, perhaps in conjunction with British Shipbuilders, local authorities are prepared to provide money for research and there is a strong will to keep the works open, partly to develop a new engine, but also to develop the last of the Doxford engines for new types of fuel, involving coal as well as oil. That has enormous export potential for power stations in the United States and one would think that a Government with any interest in maintaining an industrial nation would be interested in such a project.

However, because no company has yet made a concrete offer, the Government and British Shipbuilders are not prepared to allow a stay of execution and to keep the works open. The Minister of State seems to think that it is as easy to sell a works when it is closed as when it is open. He ought to remember that not only physical assets are involved. We must also consider the skills of the workers, the traditions of the works and the teamwork. All that needs to be kept going.

Unless the Government take action in the next few days they will be responsible for the death of a great national asset which could have been the basis of a rebirth of a British domestic engine. That would be shameful and, even at this late stage, I urge the Minister to reconsider the closure.

As has been said, when talking about redundancies we have to accept that no one has the right to sell his job. It is not his job to sell; it is the job of his son or daughter and the job of generations to come.

I beg the Minister of State to think about what will happen in my community if the huge merchant yards are closed. There is massive youth unemployment in Sunderland—it is almost as bad as the rate in areas such as west Belfast. In the east end of Sunderland, unemployment is over 55 per cent.

The Minister should ask himself where young people in Sunderland will get skilled or even unskilled work if the shipyards close. The town is being decimated; there is nothing left. We must be approaching the worst crisis faced by a town the size of Sunderland since the war.

Shipbuilding is the key. If thousands of redundancies take place on the river Wear and the jobs are lost, the unemployment rate will be devastating. Some pockets of Sunderland already have unemployment rates approaching 50 per cent. and there is no hope there for young people. Those pockets will spread widely and the town will become a disaster area.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one reason why Nissan went to Sunderland was that there was a reservoir of skilled and untrained labour available there? That was an attraction. There is decline, but new industries are going to the area and are attracted by the available labour market.

Mr. Clay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening, because I wished to conclude with a reference to Nissan. Whatever our views about Nissan — the disadvantages, the benefits, the effect on the rest of the British car industry and so on — even if we take an enthusiastic view, we must realise that, given that the first stage of the Nissan development will provide only 400 or 500 jobs, we shall need a Nissan every six days to match the redundancies already announced in the north-east.

Even if phase 2 of the Nissan project goes ahead, and we get 2,000 jobs—though without the sort of spin-off that comes from shipbuilding — we shall need three Nissans to make up for the loss of jobs that directly depend on shipbuilding on the Wear.

Virtually everyone who works in the shipyards on the Wear lives within a mile or two of the river. Many workers live very close to the yards. The workers at Nissan will be drawn from a wide catchment area and some will probably come from as far away as the constituency of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). The hon. Gentleman made a valuable point, because it showed how desperate we are in the north-east. Even phase 2 of Nissan will be only a marginal compensation for the industrial holocaust that Wearside faces. I urge the Minister to consider the consequences of allowing this madness to go ahead.

5.47 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I underline the point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) ended. It is difficult for us to convey in the House the feeling in our constituencies about unemployment. Somehow, trying to explain the horror and destruction of unemployment numbs our debates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North did a service to the House, to his constituents and to many others by bringing us back to the desperate situation that many people already face or may have to face unless the Government change their policy towards the shipbuilding industry.

As on previous occasions, I agreed with part of the speech of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). I was much attracted by his idea that stability would be given to our industry if the Ministry of Defence could be persuaded to establish a five-year rolling programme of defence orders. I know some of the difficulties involved. For example, the relative price of defence equipment is rising faster than the general level of prices, and that would have to be taken into account, but I sympathise with British Shipbuilders in the difficulties that it has faced over recent years in not knowing what defence orders would be placed in the near future.

I expressed that sympathy with the directors of British Shipbuilders despite the fact that I and other Wirral Membrs are less than happy with the lack of support that British Shipbuilders seems to be giving to Cammell Laird. The scheme proposed by the hon. Member for Eastleigh would be even better if it included a provision for some orders to be earmarked for Cammell Laird. But perhaps I ask too much.

Dr. Godman: In connection with Ministry of Defence orders for the warship yards, is not one of the difficulties the elongated lead time demanded, or argued for, by the Ministry between the building of the first vessel of a new type and the placing of subsequent orders? Would not a reduction in the lead time help the warship yards?

Mr. Field: It certainly would. One of the difficulties with defence ordering at present is that, understandably, the Ministry wants to get as good value for money as possible. That policy can penalise the lead yards in that they incur the initial cost of developing an order, while other yards can bid for subsequent orders at much lower cost. Getting value for money creates real difficulties in terms of stability for the lead yards. That is an important matter, but one that I cannot deal with in this short speech.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) asked the Minister whether he could be given information about the terms of sale for our various yards, and the Minister kindly agreed to send him that information. I would be grateful if I, too, could be given details not only of the Cammell Laird sale but of the sale of other yards too.

Although, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have rightly allowed us, because of the urgency of the matter in our constituencies, to draw the terms of the debate somewhat widely, there is a specific measure under discussion. I was puzzled by a fault of logic in the Minister's presentation of clause 1. He painted a picture of the difficulties of continuing the scheme under the Government's privatisation measures. Not possessing the skill of writing shorthand, I did not write down the Minister's exact words, but his image was one of a growing problem of redundancy, a big scheme and a large bureaucracy. He suggested that those were not conditions that the Government would wish on the industry that they mean to privatise. It is difficult to square that image with the growth that the Government tell us will result from privatisation.

Mr. Norman Lamont *rose*——

Mr. Field: I will happily give way in a moment. If the Government are confident that their privatisation measures will be good for the industry and that our share of the world market will increase, there should be less need for a redundancy scheme than there is now and it should be easier to apply a national scheme.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman seems to have misunderstood me. He seems to be referring to what I said about the scheme in relation to the state sector. I said that with a very small remaining state sector — 11,000 employees in British Shipbuilders — it would be inappropriate to retain a statutory scheme rather than settling one within the industry. My remarks did not apply to the private sector. The scheme has never applied to the private sector, and if it were to do so it would first have to be amended.

Mr. Field: I accept that as the scheme was designed at a time when the industry was wholly in the public sector, it obviously did not apply to the private sector. However, the Minister's logic is still at fault. There will be far less difficulty in fitting the private companies into a national scheme, by putting a levy on them, if they are successful, than there would be if they were not so successful.

I was troubled by another of the Minister's remarks. We all accept the sad need to extend the scheme. In his defence of doing so the Minister said that the Government were not at fault, because the industry was dependent on the world market. To some extent, we would agree with that. However, if, unlike some other industries, shipbuilding is

[Mr. Field]

dependent on the level of world trade, is it not more important to protect the workers in that industry with adequate redundancy schemes than workers in industries that are not open to international competition? If the Minister bases his defence of the extension of the scheme on the existence of a situation that is largely outside Government control, surely the Government have a bigger duty than they would otherwise have to make sure that the workers in that industry are adequately protected?

When referring to Cammell Laird, the Minister said that the moderates had voted with their feet and defied the militants. I consulted the men and women who work for Cammell Laird about what I should say in this debate. They wish me to address three questions to the Minister and to report his replies. First, there is a feeling that the Department of Industry "has it in"—in the words of the employees—for Cammell Laird. In the way that people pick up such information, they have heard that the Department of Trade and Industry takes the view that there is at least one yard too many and that one should close. They have also picked up the idea that the Government feel that it would be difficult to sell Cammell Laird in its present state and that it would be better to run it down, so that there is no work force there, before selling it. Are those the views of the Department? The reason why those ideas have currency in our town is that the work force believes that the Department is blocking the decisions on where the type 22s should go. I hope that the Minister can tell me how the Department views the future of Cammell Laird.

Secondly, if that is how the Department of Trade and Industry intends to fight its corner over the future shape of the industry, the employees would like the Minister to consider that that view is at odds with that taken by other Government Departments which have shown confidence in the area. It is not so long ago that the Lord Chancellor fought his corner in Cabinet and succeeded in persuading his Cabinet colleagues to place the Land Registry in Birkenhead. The effect of that welcome move, which was an attempt to stem the rising tide of unemployment in the Birkenhead area, would be more than wiped out if the Department closed Cammell Laird. Does the Minister understand how other Departments have backed the area? Why do people have those feelings about the attitude of the Department of Trade and Industry to their future?

The third question takes up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North about the level of unemployment in the area and what the Government have said about how to beat the apparently ever-rising tide of unemployment. The workers feel that by walking back to work, implementing the flexibility agreement, negotiating with the tug men to achieve the rig out of the dry dock and making sure that the type 42 will be finished before the scheduled date, they are doing all that the Government have asked them to do. They believe that, that being so, if the Government do not give them one of the type 22 orders, it will be the Government who are walking away from the area. The Government will have made the cruel choice that one of the yards that they wish to be closed prior to privatisation is Cammell Laird.

I should be grateful if the Minister could answer those three questions asked by the men and women of Cammell Laird, and allay their anxieties.

5.59 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The key issue in this debate is where the Bill takes the industry. The inescapable conclusion is that it takes us towards contraction, closure and the ruination of shipbuilding communities. All that the Government have done in their consistent approach to the industry strikes another blow at the nation's industrial base. The blow will work its way through other industrial sectors and into the service sector and will further weaken the industrial, commercial and employment base of the British economy. We are today discussing an issue which is wider than the arrangements for reducing British Shipbuilders.

The Government's approach to Britain's industries is completely wrong. The future of service sector industries such as ancillary engineering industries is entwined with those of our great primary industries. Just because banks, insurance companies, lawyers and suppliers to shipyards can take their profit margins and thus call themselves profitable, that does not mean that they will still be able to take their percentage when there are no primary industries for them to take a percentage from. The Government persistently ignore that strategic fact, which overshadows the debate. I have never heard them answer that issue convincingly. They seem to think that, after the industrial sector has been trimmed, the service sector will remain and survive on foreign revenue. That is an absurd belief.

The Minister said that the industry was contracting. Everyone involved in the industry knows what is happening. The argument is not about what is happening but about what we do about it. Instead of protecting the industry in a world crisis, the Minister is introducing a Bill to facilitate its contraction. He has chosen today's debate to tell us, for the first time, that the Government envisage all the warship yards being privatised by March 1986. I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I misheard him. The current ordering requirements of the Ministry of Defence are less than the total capacity of the warship yards, or those yards which are now designated as warship yards. Swan Hunter has a history of warship construction, yet it has not been regarded as a purely warship building yard. It is now to be privatised, on the assumption that its future is overwhelmingly as a warship yard. In other words, there is no future for merchant shipbuilding at Swan Hunter—that is the logic of the Minister's plans. Equally serious is the Government's intention to leave to the private sector the choice about which warship yard stays open. Some yards will be purchased for use as warship yards and others will not.

The Minister must be candid with us about the future of yards which the private sector does not want. I shall willingly give way if the Minister wants to explain the Government's view. He is reluctant to do so. The key fact is that there is only one major customer—the Ministry of Defence—and at the moment there is not enough work to go round. The Government have complete control over that. They are deliberately holding up work, such as the two outstanding type 22 orders, to encourage redundancies and facilitate privatisation with small labour forces. The Minister said that no further redundancies are contemplated but that the scheme is being extended to December 1986 just in case. Just in case? If the two type 22 orders do not go to Swan Hunter soon, there will be a further round of redundancies of between 800 and 1,000

men. However, if the work goes to Swan Hunter, there will be redundancies at the two other yards which are bidding for the same order.

By saying that the redundancy scheme will end by December 1986, the Minister is encouraging people to leave the industry before privatisation. To that end, the industry is deliberately being starved of work. To that end also we are told that the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme will not be continued into privatisation. There is no respect in that for people's accrued rights in employment and no sympathy for the special nature of shipbuilding communities. In the four shipbuilding local government wards in my constituency, 49 per cent. of the unemployed men are time-served skilled men. Do we hear from the Government about alternative employment initiatives? We do not. Quite the reverse—assistance to the region is to be reduced. The unemployed and the displaced must be offered a future, or the pressures on the social fabric of the community, as shipbuilding Members of Parliament have warned before, will become unbearable. Young people who looked to Swan Hunter for employment and apprenticeships have no future in alternative employment. They did not have such a future last year and the Bill says that they will have none next year.

The Minister gave us his view of circumstances in merchant shipbuilding but, significantly, he did not say what level of merchant shipbuilding capacity the Government are committed to retaining. It is not enough to ask the parliamentary Liberal party for its view—we want the Minister's view. If the era of combined yards such as Swan Hunter is at an end, the Minister should explain what size merchant shipbuilding industry the Government will retain through British Shipbuilders and whether that is being calculated in money terms, tonnage, or the numbers of people employed. They should also tell us whether the issue is to be left to the Government's mythical concept of a free market. In successive debates on this subject, I and other Labour Members have said that there is no free market in world shipbuilding, least of all in world merchant shipbuilding. The Government have a duty to respond to that fact by rescuing and protecting the industry, not by killing it off.

The redundancy scheme is no longer generous. It was originally designed to run by the side of national redundancy payment entitlements and to encourage older workers to leave the industry, almost by taking a form of early retirement. However, they were to leave an industry which it was planned would survive and have a future. The scheme's cash value has not kept pace with inflation and its original purpose has been lost sight of. It is now being used cynically to restructure the industry—the profitable parts being in the private sector and the labour force being dramatically reduced.

At Swan Hunter, British Shipbuilders managers are hoping to become private owners. At the moment, those managers have a duty to British Shipbuilders, which is their employer, and to their shareholders—to us, the British taxpayers. They cannot sneak away from that duty. They are in a difficult position when they say publicly that they want to be part of a private consortium which hopes to take over Swan Hunter's assets. My fear is that, if there is industrial trouble at Swan Hunter, whether about privatisation or any other issue, it will be provoked by the management before privatisation so that the state bears the cost. That would be deeply wrong.

I issue a clear warning to the management of Swan Hunter: if they challenge individual representatives of the work force, such as a convenor, in a dispute about disciplinary matters and try to provoke industrial confrontation, they will find that they are opposed by every trade unionist on Tyneside. They will not be forgiven for putting the local industry through that extra pain.

I am deeply saddened by what the Government are doing and by the fact that there is no recognition of the special problems of shipbuilding areas. Like others, I have warned that the social fabric of our shipbuilding communities cannot take much more of this. The Government must respond or we shall find that the social fabric has torn under the strain.

6.9 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): It is not often, Mr. Speaker, that I participate in a debate when you are present. Therefore, rather belatedly on the ninth day of 1985, I wish you every health and happiness and a less troublesome year.

The key to this debate is difficult to discern. Since the general election, my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and I have on at least nine occasions spoken on the Floor of the House about shipping and shipbuilding. As I said just before Christmas, it is difficult to come up with any new ideas.

I refer the Minister to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* by John Petty, the shipping correspondent, whose advice, knowledge and information are second to none. He says that British and European shipowners have agreed to link up in an attempt to survive against the collapse of markets, bankruptcies and increasing competition. The Minister and his civil servants are now aware of that simple proposition, but we have been aware of it for the last 15 or 20 years and have made such statements time and again.

That article names four companies which are going into bankruptcy or liquidation. A European company called Gazocean, the principal shareholder of which is Gaz de France, is likely to go bust, as is the Kotka Line, which operates a service from Finland to Immingham. Our friends across the Irish channel also have a company which has gone into liquidation.

With the exception of the first, these are not large companies, but they are examples of a continuing decline in shipping, both in the United Kingdom and in Europe. Therefore, I hope that I understand the scale of the problem facing the Government, just as I understood the scale of the problem facing the previous Labour Government. The method of approaching the problem is still open to question and debate, and while privatisation may be a short-term profitable answer, it is not the answer in the long term.

For the 2,000 people in question in my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), the Government say that there is no answer. Consequently, the number asking for redundancy has exceeded the number expected to be made redundant. I and my Labour colleagues in the northern group of Labour Members were prepared to mount a massive "Save our Shipyards" campaign in conjunction with the local authorities, but the scale of defeatism is such that that campaign cannot be mounted unless the workers have a will to fight and to recognise that there is a future, not merely for themselves, but for the

[Mr. Ted Garrett]

society in which they live. That is the scale of the tragedy. Morale has gone, and consequently the will to win has diminished to the point of no return.

Many of these men thought that they had a working life ahead of them. All of them possess various skills, such as designers and naval architects. Many others have university degrees. They have devoted much thought and time to the skills which even now make our ships the envy of the world—for example, the dual-purpose Atlantic Conveyor. Those men have lost their enthusiasm. They want to leave the industry and, if possible, to start a new career. They will probably join the drift from the north-east and other areas to the already over-populated south, and, given their skills and knowledge, these people should have a better chance of a job in the south than in the regions.

So far, no Labour Member has mentioned clause 2, which relates to money. The average redundancy payment will be just over £5,000. Is it fair, honest or equitable that such a sum should be offered from state funds when miners are being offered £1,000 per year of service? The offer to the miners is reasonable. Equally, is it fair that farmers going out of milk production should receive more generous payments relative to what will be offered to men of equal, and in many cases superior, skills, who have served their country in an equal capacity?

Mr. Dixon: And dockers.

Mr. Garrett: I agree with my hon. Friend. Somehow, we have got ourselves in a position in which we are not offering fair compensation terms to men in the shipbuilding industry.

The Redundancy Payments Act 1965 was introduced by Mr. Ray Gunter, then Minister of Labour. He understood labour problems, and to the memory of his name I should add that he was a first-class Minister of Labour. I well remember the speeches that he made, and he always emphasised that the Redundancy Payments Act was designed merely to tide people over until they got another job. However, it is no longer easy to get another job or to move from one occupation to another, so the financial terms under that Act and the terms that are now being offered are completely inadequate. When this Bill goes to Committee, I hope that Committee members will consider more reasonable terms.

I do not intend to say whether the £1,000 per year of service to miners is adequate or not, but had Lord Gormley still been president of the NUM he would not have been involved in a strike but would have argued from the start that the £1,000 per year of service for redundancy should be used as the basis for negotiation. Something different might have emerged. Regrettably, that has not happened. We cannot even accept as a basis for negotiation the present terms offered to those who must leave the shipbuilding industry. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow replies he will encourage the Committee, on an all-party basis, to consider more adequate terms of compensation. If I am lucky enough to be a member of the Committee, that will be a main theme in my contributions to it.

6.20 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): First, I echo the sentiments expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) about the Turkish order for five vessels. If the order materialises for Govan Shipbuilders, as I am sure it will, it will be a marvellous shot in the arm for Clark-Kincaids, the engine builders in my constituency. Kincaids built the engine for the Atlantic Conveyor. The workmanship and delivery times were a delight to the directors of Cunard. Kincaids could, with the assistance of British Shipbuilders, easily take on the task of re-engining the QE2. There is much press speculation about that now, and Cunard should give the order to Kincaids.

As both the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Govan mentioned Scott Lithgow and as it is wholly and exclusively in my constituency, I also have a right to mention it. I sincerely and fervently hope that the contingent liability of British Shipbuilders in respect of 1,500 employees of Scott Lithgow being made redundant within a year of the sale will not have to be honoured.

Business is going well at the yard and the Government could help further by placing Ministry of Defence orders with Scott Lithgow. I think principally of follow-up orders for the SKK 2400 conventional patrol submarine. I hasten to add for the benefit of my colleagues that that vessel will not carry nuclear missiles. I am confident that offshore orders will be placed with Scott Lithgow. The directors of Trafalgar House have assured me about local employment, especially selection and training issues, and I believe that they are men of their word. Under its new owners, Scott Lithgow deserves the warm support of all, not merely of those in Scotland.

The provisions in clause 1 should and must be extended beyond December 1986. The Minister's comments will dismay many employees of British Shipbuilders. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said, much more needs to be done for those communities which have suffered from the decline of this once-great industry. Although I warmly welcome the continuing developments in the information technology industry, especially the expansion of IBM and National Semiconductor, we must remember that male unemployment is at a dismally high level—about 23 per cent. Investment is necessary both for the infrastructure of a savaged, wounded region and for the industries there.

The debate takes place at a most gloomy time for the shipbuilding and shipping industries. Almost everywhere we see, if not a continuing and remorseless decline, the dismantling of a great industry.

Mr. Roy Farndon, editor of *Lloyd's List*, put two questions to a meeting of the Greenwich Forum in 1983. He asked:

> "Can London sell its shipping and ship management and shipping finance skills as the size of the British-owned fleet—let alone the British-registered fleet—continues to decline? . . . And with the stupefying contraction of British and European merchant shipbuilding and repair, it can be asked whether London's skills in shipbuilding finance, classification and design, can prosper independent of the economic host."

The Government are failing in their duty if they stand aside while the contraction continues. Mr. Farndon's questions emphasise the importance of shipbuilding and shipping to the maritime service industries. Sometimes we overlook the importance of shipbuilding and shipping to the marine equipment industries and to many finance houses and merchant banks in the City.

As some hon. Members know, shipbuilding, shipping and ancillary services are of crucial importance to my constituency. Clark-Kincaids is the only merchant engine

builder on the Clyde today. It has an important interdependent relationship with the Govan shipyard and other British Shipbuilders yards. It is essential that that marine engine building capacity is maintained, not only for the people directly involved on the lower Clyde but for the entire British shipbuilding industry.

The yard of Ferguson-Ailsa is also in my constituency. It has a fine management-worker relationship and it builds first-class vessels, especially smaller vessels. The yard is fighting hard to gain a foothold in export markets for offshore support vessels. In line with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Govan said about the Turkish order for Govan, I hope that the Minister and his Department are giving every assistance to Ferguson-Ailsa of Port Glasgow and Troon in the important area of offshore supply vessels.

Scott Lithgow is not now owned by British Shipbuilders, but it is rapidly improving its market image in offshore construction and, I hope, soon will again become the best yard for the building of conventional patrol submarines. I should like to see Scott Lithgow and Vickers sharing the building of the SKK 2400 conventional submarine. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) said, there is potentially a marvellous export market for that vessel.

British Shipbuilders can compete with other western European yards. However, European yards cannot hope to compete with yards in Japan or South Korea. There are no easy answers on the international scene. Both those countries now have huge shipbuilding industries. An idea of the size of the Japanese industry can be gained when one discovers that the Sanko order of 111 bulk carriers represents just four months' work for the Japanese industry. Japan is becoming worried about the growth of the South Korean industry.

There is an unbridgeable gap between the prices offered by South Korean yards and those offered by western European yards. James Davis, a director of Kleinwort, Benson Ltd., spoke at a meeting of the Greenwich Forum about a visit that he and other western European industrialists made to South Korea, and about the attitudes of shipbuilding directors there. He said:

"The best way of describing their attitude is perhaps by describing the extreme answer we got from one of them, Mr. Hong of Daewoo. He said that of course we all came from half-time Europe. That was an opening remark and we asked him what he meant by it. He told us that his men expect to work six-and-a-half days a week, unless there was a big job on, in which case they could not take all that time off . . . They work intensively. He said, 'the trouble is now it is a time of comparative advantage. It is Korea's turn. You had your turn in Europe. Japan has had its turn. Now it is our turn."

The international circumstances are extremely difficult, but they will be worsened by the growth of the Republic of China as a shipbuilding nation and by the continuing growth of Brazilian shipbuilding.

In an age of protectionism, Government intervention and subsidy, it is rubbish to talk about free markets and the freedom of international trade. The Government must defend our maritime industries with the same zeal that they display for the privatisation of public corporations and services. Much more is required than the payment of redundancy cheques to those who are forced out of what the Minister called this contracting industry.

The continuing decline of the merchant shipbuilding industry must be halted. A depressed home market has a dreadful effect not only on the communities within which the shipyards are situated but on industries and communities far removed from our maritime communities.

Mr. T. W. Bewsey, director of the British Marine Equipment Council, said recently:

"At the present moment the situation on the home market is bad and shows no sign of improving in either the short or the long-term. This is because the depressed state of the world shipping market will continue for several years and as a result the level of orders for new tonnage will continue to be very low . . . If the UK is to retain a merchant shipbuilding industry in the overall national interest, with particular regard to defence considerations, then the Government must continue to consider seriously what means are necessary for survival; otherwise the industries concerned will disappear, never to be replaced."

Given the gloomy economic circumstances of shipbuilding, shipping and maritime services, the time has arrived for a Royal Commission on the British maritime industries. Such a commission could assess the present and future circumstances of our maritime industries perhaps more adequately than could a Select Committee. The idea of a Royal Commission was mooted last year by the editor of *Lloyd's List*, and I heartily commend the proposition to the House. I say that despite a reprimand that I received from the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who reminded me in a conversation outside the Chamber that a former Labour Prime Minister said that setting up a Royal Commission to examine an issue puts back the policy decisions on that issue by four years. I accept the hon. Gentleman's strictures, but although it is essential for the House and its Select Committees to examine the needs of our maritime industries, I believe that we also need a Royal Commission.

The Government must also encourage the development of a buoyant home market. That is especially true of the offshore oil and gas industries. Traditional maritime industries have an important role to play in oil and gas, not only on the United Kingdom continental shelf but elsewhere. There are no easy answers, but no Government should ignore the continuing contraction in shipping and shipbuilding.

6.35 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The Bill has a short title and when I first saw it—my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) had the same impression — it seemed to be innocuous and modest. However, as the Minister of State moved the Second Reading today, it became clear that the Bill has many implications. It was almost as though the Minister had opened a can of worms. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that it could be inferred that the Government wished to stop redundancy payments as that would shift the burden of labour before privatisation and thus make the shipyards more attractive financially to their friends. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will explain that to the House when he replies to the debate.

It was staggering to hear the Minister talk about a contracting industry and then to explain, rightly, that he could not give the House an overall costing of the scheme because it depended upon the number of people who were made redundant. I understand the logic of that, but the Government must have some idea of the long-term size of the British shipbuilding capability, both merchant and naval. Can the Minister give us some idea of the

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manpower requirements that the Government envisage in the immediate and medium-term futures? The Minister must have those figures; or he certainly should have them.

When we talk about redundancies, we are talking about human beings. As so often in shipbuilding debates, we talk about orders and yards and tend to forget that in those yards there are individuals. I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) said about massive payouts not applying to shipbuilding. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said that an average payment of £5,000 was not much compensation for losing one's job.

The problems that we have heard about today from Labour Members — most of those who have spoken in the debate are Labour Members — are similar. The problems of Tyneside are echoed on Wearside, on the Clyde and on Merseyside. There is shameful unemployment in those areas, which are economic blackspots. Redundancies of 2,000 or more have a tremendous effect on communities. When a shiprepair yard in my constituency was privatised, there were massive lay-offs. I now share a travel-to-work area with my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), and it gives me no pleasure to say that we experience the highest level of unemployment in England. When we hear of the further redundancies in shipbuilding on the Tyne — because many people from south Tyneside go across the river to Swan Hunter or they work in the Jarrow and Hebburn areas — we wonder how much longer our communities can survive.

I want to press the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East. Is it not about time that the Government realised that it is not just individuals who are affected, vitally important though they may be? Communities are also affected. Does the Minister appreciate the loss in rateable value to communities such as south Tyneside, north Tyneside, Glasgow and Sunderland resulting from shipbuilding closures? It runs into millions of pounds, and it makes the problems of the local authorities in those shipbuilding redundancy areas even more acute.

I know that there is the EEC scheme, but, just as the Government's shipbuilding redundancy scheme is far less generous than those operating in the mining and steel industries, so the EEC scheme is literally peanuts compared with what is offered to the coal and steel closure areas. When the Government are discussing shipbuilding redundancies, I urge them strongly to pay particular attention to the communities affected.

I realise that the men who work in the shipbuilding industry and who perhaps are contemplating accepting redundancy have made Herculean efforts to increase productivity. We have the Ark Royal being built on the Tyne, and it is months ahead of schedule. We had the Atlantic Conveyor launched recently only a few days after the rescheduled delivery date, and the managing director and the chairman of Cunard paid tribute to the quality of the work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend touched on a pertinent point when he reminded us that we are discussing a shipbuilding Bill concerned with redundancy at the very time when morale in the shipyards is at its lowest ebb ever. One has only to listen to people talking in the pubs and clubs of Tyneside to understand the extent of the desperation and despondency among them. That is one reason why people are queuing up to take redundancy. It is out of sheer desperation, and it is a tragedy for the country, because those skilled men are vitally needed in our nation. If we lose their skills we shall live to regret it.

We saw only two years ago during the Falklands crisis how men worked night and day to meet the Government's deadlines and managed to help the victory that we sought. But it was a very close run thing, and I doubt whether we could mount the same operation today. Even then we got through only by chartering Scandinavian vessels. At one time the Government were trying to buy a Danish vessel because there were not enough British vessels. That is how desperate the situation is, and that is why as a nation we cannot afford to allow these redundancies to go ahead and the shipbuilding industry to run down.

Does the Minister not appreciate that his proposals for privatisation are the raison d'etre for the demoralisation among members of management teams as well as the work force? The proof of the pudding is in the eating, because we see it in the private yards already. Those who work in the industry see privatisation as casualisation. When they hear talk about the market place, they see it as appearing on a Monday morning and two men being selected out of 50. They see those bad days coming back again, and it is impossible to build a life and a community based on that amount of uncertainty. That is one reason why there is so much demoralisation.

How can we get across to the Minister this point about the market? It is not the market place where labour is hired and fired. How can we get it across to him that there is no such thing as a free market in shipbuilding? Shipbuilding is concerned with strategy and with strategic decisions taken by the Government about the size of the industry. That is why I laid so much stress at the beginning of my remarks on trying to press the Government to say what they saw as the size of our shipbuilding industry. There is no such thing as a free market, and it is about time that the Government recognised that, as an island nation and a maritime power, we need not only British-owned ships to carry goods, but the facilities to build those ships.

I make one final plea. The Government are always exhorting the entrepreneurial nature of British industry. Some of the private yards in the ship repair industry have worked very hard to get jobs. A lot of the work comes from the Soviet Union, especially in the north-east of England where there is easy access from the Baltic and the north Arctic. I understand that currently the Government are negotiating with the Soviet Union with a view to excluding Soviet vessels from the river Tyne. I have had a partial assurance from them that this will not be pursued, but I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind, look into it, and realise how important it is for our shipbuilding industry that we retain that trade with the Soviet Union.

6.45 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): We have had a number of shipbuilding debates since 1979, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) reminded us. Unfortunately, they have been about either the curtailment of borrowing powers or the extension of redundancy scheme payments. It is bad when my hon. Friends have to welcome the extension of a redundancy payments scheme. However, those being thrown on the scrap heap

have a right to be cushioned financially, albeit not as well cushioned as some others being thrown out of work by the Government.

When we discuss clause 1, we are talking about bribing people into idleness. In the Tyne and Wear area the 2,100 workers being made redundant by Swan Hunter will never work again. It is criminal that the skills of these shipyard workers, learnt over many years, should be thrown away, bearing in mind especially that we are a maritime country. In 1982-83, the number employed by British Shipbuilders fell by 22 per cent. to a low of 48,550.

Unfortunately, I had to leave the debate for a time because the Employment Select Committee was meeting to discuss the closure of 29 skillcentres in areas such as my own, where 2,100 shipyard workers are to be thrown on to the streets. That is why I missed the speeches of the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), as well as the end of the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith).

At the beginning of his remarks my right hon. and learned Friend put his finger on this so-called innocuous Bill about the extension of redundancy payments, because he drew attention to one or two extremely important aspects of it. Those who are to be privatised will lose their redundancy payments under British Shipbuilders' redundancy scheme. The Minister tried to say that this was no different from the position of those who had been privatised before. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Govan reminded us, on 1 February last year I asked:

"If Scott Lithgow is taken over by a private company will the Minister ensure that all the workers receive their full entitlement from the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme?"

The Minister replied:

"I think that that assurance can be given. They will be eligible for the redundancy scheme."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1984; Vol. 53, c. 352.]

The Minister also said that no one previously received anything from the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme after it had been privatised. In the same debate I made the point that Tyne Shiprepairers, which had been taken over by its directors, had received £4·2 million in a buy-out from the redundancy scheme. How does the Minister square that with his statement to the House tonight? He obviously misled the House tonight when he said that in future companies would not be dealt with any differently from those in the past. That is not true.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As I recall, some people who were made redundant at the time of Scott Lithgow may have qualified for payment under the scheme when the company was part of British Shipbuilders, but when a company enters the private sector the redundancy payments scheme does not apply to it. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is true that in some situations where companies such as Tyne Shiprepairers have been privatised compensation has been paid, but that compensation has been paid not as of right, because there was no statutory right, but as a result of negotiations.

When the warship yards are returned to the private sector, they are in the same position as other companies in the private sector. There may be an opportunity to negotiate compensation; there may be an opportunity for them to join schemes in those companies; there may be an opportunity for new schemes to be negotiated; but there is no statutory right, and there never has been, with this scheme. If it were to apply to the private sector there would have had to be a specific provision in the legislation. *[Interruption.]* It may or may not be the case that I should have included such a provision, but Labour Members cannot claim to be surprised, because it manifestly is not there, and the position on the scheme is as it has always been.

Mr. Dixon: The Minister says that the companies have no right. The Act implicitly says that when people leave the employment of British Shipbuilders they are entitled to the benefits of a redundancy scheme over and above the national scheme. If a firm is privatised, those people will no longer work for British Shipbuilders, and under that Act they are entitled to their redundancy scheme. That was the reason why Tyne Shiprepairers was bought out. That was the reason why that was negotiated. That was the reason why, when members of Tyne Shiprepairers accepted £2,100 as part of the buy-out from the shipbuilding redundancy scheme, they also had a guarantee of 12 months' employment with the new company. At the time the payment under the British Shipbuilders redundancy scheme worked out at about £10·7 million, compared with £4·2 million under the buy-out.

At that time I asked the Minister what was happening to the other £6·5 million. Had the shipyard not been privatised, the Government would have had to finance British Shipbuilders to pay that money. There are rumours at the moment about pits being privatised. I wonder whether the miners working in those pits will receive redundancy payments under the mineworkers' redundancy scheme which is on the table at the present time. However, as the Minister says, that aspect can be debated in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) talked about the effects of unemployment in parts of Sunderland. He referred to the fact that East End ward has an unemployment rate of 65 per cent. That is possibly true of many areas in Tyne and Wear, and probably in Scotland and Birkenhead. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) told the Minister about the level of unemployment in his area. He also asked some specific questions which were reiterated by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown).

My hon. Friend asked what had happened about the orders for the type 22 destroyers which had been promised. They were promised before the summer recess. They were promised again in September, November and December. When my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and I went to the Ministry of Defence in December, we were told that they would possibly come at the end of January. One is suspicious when such orders are held back at a time when shipbuilders are to be privatised. One wonders whether such orders are deliberately held back because the privatisation scheme is on the board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East also mentioned the possibility of victimisation. I can give the Minister some idea of what happens in the shipbuilding industry in that regard. I was sacked from my job as a shop steward in the shipbuilding industry, and I could not get a job in that industry for a considerable time. Tory Members and Ministers talk about secondary picketing. We have heard a lot about that during the miners' strike. However, the employers do not need to put

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anyone outside a gate to stop a worker going to work. They pick the phone up and tell the personnel officer not to employ a particular person under any circumstances. That is what happened to me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned the problems and anxieties of Scott Lithgow and Clark-Kincaid. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields mentioned redundancy pay, the level of manpower and how long we will have redundancies in the shipbuilding industries. He also mentioned another important point. Both he and I have had letters from constituents about the rumour that Russian vessels will be prohibited from using the river Tyne. Our ship repairers have always had several Russian vessels to work on. I hope that the Minister will throw some light on that rumour. We shall certainly take the matter up with the Ministry of Defence, which is possibly where the answer lies.

We have heard during the debate about redundancies and problems in the shipbuiiding industry. If they are international problems, the Government can help out. One can find little good to say about Mr. Graham Day, the chairman of British Shipbuilders, other than that he carries out to the letter his instructions from the Government. In *Shipbuildng News* in December he said:

> "A number of countries operate domestic preference schemes which secure the dual objectives of sustaining a national fleet and enabling a hard pressed shipbuilding industry to restructure on the back of a workload, albeit reduced."

He suggests there that some countries give preference to their shipbuilding industry which Britain does not. That is certainly worth quoting, coming as it does from Mr. Graham Day. It is a pity that he did not take a few more lessons from his predecessor, Sir Robert Atkinson, who used to fight the corner of British Shipbuilders. Unfortunately, Mr. Graham Day is doing what he was instructed to do—to cut the shipbuilding industry down to virtually nothing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend said, since 1979 shipbuilding workers have been demoralised because they have had nothing but redundancies. There was the first corporate plan from Sir Robert Atkinson, who talked about a 400,000 tonne throughput. Incidentally, that is the nearest that British Shipbuilders ever came to breaking even. The year that it had a 400,000 tonne throughput was the year that it came within £19 million of breaking even. That is the best year that British Shipbuilders has had. Now Mr. Graham Day talks about a throughput of less than 200,000 tonnes. That is the reason for the present reduction in manpower in the shipbuilding industry.

Most of my hon. Friends who have spoken tonight belong to the Tyne and Wear area. Like me, my hon. Friends the Members for Wallsend, for South Shields and for Newcastle upon Tyne, East are concerned about that area. At the height of the shipbuilding boom 100,000 men were employed in the Tyne and Wear area, but today fewer than 12,000 work there, and that is without the present redundancies. There have been redundancies at Swan Hunter and BS(ETS). Indeed, this morning I was told that Palmers Hebburn of British Shipbuilders is to be put in moth balls. This morning the management told the shop stewards that the yard was going on to care and maintenance. A couple of years ago that yard was employing 2,000 men. That is the scale of the unemployment in that area. Hon. Members should bear in mind that for every man who works as an assembler in the yard, another three men work in supplying the industry.

Our area is being hit in particular because in the northern region male employment has been 25 per cent. dependent on industries such as heavy engineering, coal mining and shipbuilding. That compares with a figure of 8 per cent. for the rest of the country. Thus, with the decline in heavy engineering, the area has been badly hit. In the Jarrow and Hebburn area, male unemployment amounts to 31·3 per cent., without taking into account the present redundancies at Swan Hunter. In south Tyneside as a whole 15,529 people are unemployed, and of them 11,120 are men. That means that 29·5 per cent. of the male population of south Tyneside are out of work. Yet those people have contributed to the local budget.

There has been a reduction in rate income, because if a shipyard closes less money goes to the local authority. Indeed, that point was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. The young and active who take the advice of the former Secretary of State for Employment, now Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and get on their bikes do not take the old people's homes, community centres or local authority facilities with them. Therefore, those facilities have to be provided by the remaining elderly population. That has a tremendous impact on areas such as ours.

The task force has been given various degrees of welcome, but I am told that it is only for partnership authorities. South Tyneside, which I represent, is a programmed authority. We have as many problems as—if not more than—some of the partnership authorities. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will at least consider an extension of the areas so that the task force can take over and include some of the programmed authorities. I also hope that he will get on to the Ministry of Defence and get those type 22 destroyer orders placed as soon as possible.

I have seen a press statement about £100 million of special aid for areas affected by the decline in the steel, shipbuilding and textile industries. Indeed, £10 million was for the shipbuilding industry. I hope that the Minister will make representations to get the amount increased. The amount of money for the Tyne and Wear area was £3·2 million, which is nothing compared to the devastation being wrought on it through the redundancies that we face.

I shall deal now with clause 1 and the redundancy extension. The Minister gave the game away when he said that 35,000 workers had benefited from shipbuilding redundancy payments. The Government seem to feel that a worker benefits from getting the sack and being thrown on the streets, perhaps for the rest of his life. That shows what they think about unemployment. To suggest that 35,000 people have benefited from being made redundant gives us some idea of the Government's thinking on unemployment.

The calculations for redundancy payments have not been mentioned. Both you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I sat on the same Committee and you will remember the free riders' charter and clause 1 of the Employment Bill 1982. The Government gave retrospective payments to all those who decided that they would not be members of trade unions in closed shops. The Government gave £2 million

retrospectively in order to compensate them. That free riders' charter calculation has now been increased from £145 to £154 per week.

I have little to add to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East said on clause 2. The Geddes report set up the Shipbuilding Industry Board and, of course, Upper Clyde Shipbuilders received a loan. I have spoken before about the Geddes, Paton and Booz-Allen reports. They were all produced when the shipbuilding industry was in private hands. To judge from what is said by Tory Members and Ministers, one would think that the shipbuilding industry had problems only when it was nationalised. When it was in private hands, the Geddes report led to the setting up of the Shipbuilding Industry Board, and that is why Upper Clyde Shipbuilders had to have that loan. When the shipbuilding industry was in private hands it was in a terrible mess, and that is one reason why the Labour Government nationalised it in 1977.

We shall not vote against the Bill tonight. With some reservations, we welcome the fact that the shipbuilding scheme is to be extended. I hope that some of the problems and anxieties expressed by my right hon. and hon. Friends will be thrashed out in Committee. Indeed, I hope that the Minister will take them into consideration and that when we go through the nuts and bolts of the Bill some amendments will be made. But we are rewriting history when it comes to clause 2. The Government once lent money to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders because private industry had made a mess of it, yet now the Minister will hand the same shipbuilding industry over to the same people who made such a mess of it before.

7.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): Many questions have been asked during this serious and reasoned debate, and it may be convenient if I try to answer as many as I can, particularly those from Opposition Members, who have quite legitimately pursued the interests of the industry and of their constituencies. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) would like some clarification on the position of the type 22 frigates.

The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) has a constituency with a very noble history in affairs of industrial relations and in the way that it has reacted to the scourge of unemployment. He should be aware, as he no doubt is, that total aid for the northern region since 1972 stands at more than £1 billion. The aid package, in terms of regional assistance, that is going to those areas where shipbuilding is one of the predominant industries has amounted since 1979 to about £640 million.

I hope that we can deal once and for all with the accusation that the Government are not mindful of the interests of those parts of the country that have been affected by structural unemployment, particularly in the heavy engineering sector and in the shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose*——

Mr. Butcher: I shall deal with the hon. Member's points in detail but I wish first to finish this observation. The interesting suggestion about the application of the task force to the area represented by the hon. Member for Jarrow will be noted carefully. He will appreciate that this idea has been discussed in the press but has yet to have formulation in the full interdepartmental discussions which necessarily have to take place within Whitehall. I shall bring his observations to the attention of the appropriate Ministers in Departments other than the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister tell the House where he obtained the figures?

Mr. Butcher: If the hon. Gentleman kept a close eye on *Hansard* he would have seen a question about how much regional aid had gone to the northern region since 1972. If he checks *Hansard*, I think that he will find the detailed data in a copy published three or four days before the Christmas recess. I shall send him the appropriate column.

Mr. Brown: What I am asking is where the figures that were quoted in *Hansard* came from originally — the source of the figures.

Mr. Butcher: The source was the records available to the DTI. It keeps records of section 7 assistance, regional selective assistance. We monitor the amount spent. If the hon. Gentleman wants to find the source of those figures within the Department of Trade and Industry I can only say that this Administration, like Labour Administrations, places explicit and implicit trust in its officials to keep the records accurately. We report faithfully the information to the House when it is requested in a parliamentary question. I cannot see the hon. Gentleman's point.

The hon. Gentleman made three major points which were interesting in that there was a practical philosophical element in each of them. He raised yet again an issue which I thought we had dealt with comprehensively in two previous debates on industrial policy, and not least in the last debate on shipbuilding — the importance of the manufacturing sector and manufacturing industry as opposed to service sector activity. I think it is worth repeating what I said, because I did not hear any disagreement on the last occasion. If we examine manufacturing activity we find that 80 per cent. of output is internationally tradeable. By contrast, some 18 per cent. of service sector activity is internationally tradeable. Although we have to recognise the magnificent contribution that the service sector has made to job creation, with some 280,000 extra jobs being created in the service sector in the last 18 months of the recession, we must recognise also that the wealth creation engine, the core and heart of wealth creation, will always remain within manufacturing. We have to make things which are exportable in international trading circumstances.

Mr. Brown: I agree with all that. Surely the logic of that argument supports my point and not the Minister's.

Mr. Butcher: In that case, I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's point is. I hope to demonstrate in my response to the detailed debate that we have not been tardy or unhelpful in the assistance given to the manufacturing sector. Certainly we have not been unhelpful to the shipbuilding industry. The House will be all too familiar with the £1 billion support for shipbuilding by this Administration in the previous Parliament and in this one. I resent bitterly the accusation that we have been prejudiced against the manufacturing sector. The hard cash figures as reported to the House disprove that theory.

The hon. Gentleman posed legitimately a question which should exercise the House—is the shipbuilding

[Mr. Butcher]

industry operating in a free international market? On this occasion, as on previous occasions, we have conceded that over the years a market that is decidedly not free has developed in shipbuilding and that there has been an unhelpful and, some would argue, totally unnecessary subsidy race by various shipbuilding nations to get business. Some industries and some nations are more efficient than others; therefore, they may need less recourse to subsidies. But in the main the European Community, through the intervention fund and other proposals, has had to connive in the unfortunate corrosion of the free market in shipbuilding.

As a free market does not exist, we have tried to give our domestic industry the chance to compete in that distorted market. Therefore, the answer to the question whether the world shipbuilding industry is operating in a free market is no. The Government, recognising the reality of the situation, have to give sufficient support to domestic industry to put it back in the race.

The hon. Gentleman obviously queries the source of our information. We can do no more than quote the data compiled accurately by those who work for the Government. He seemed to imply that we were prejudiced or were not helping sufficiently to overcome the special problems of shipbuilding communities. I repeat that £1 billion has gone to one key region and £640 million to other areas in which shipbuilding is a major element in job preservation. I hope that that shows that our spending patterns do not indicate a lack of concern.

In regard to the observations delivered, as ever, in a serious and measured manner by the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), I should have liked to offer him in this Second Reading debate the sort of assurances that he was seeking on the level of redundancy payments, but I hope that he will agree that these payments, which are not being changed either in character or in manner of compilation, are at least considerably more generous than the basic requirements in other industries. What fascinated me was that I had heard similar remarks eight or nine months ago in Durham in a working men's club in which I had the privilege to spend some time.

There was great concern in that Club and Institute Union club about the very generous payments available to members of the National Union of Mineworkers, should they wish to become redundant. It was claimed that we were creating a two-tier work force. Those payments were genuinely resented by members of the Transport and General Workers Union. They felt that miners were being treated hyper-generously. Shipbuilding employees do not get anything like those payments. Men driving lorries delivering coal to the power stations could not expect anything other than basic redundancy payments. There is strong feeling among workers about this. The Government are being generous enough to shipbuilding workers in regard to redundancy.

Mr. Garrett: The Minister tempts me very much to debate elitism. I shall reserve my remarks for the Committee stage, when I can prove that the elitism at the bottom end of the scale is not as important as the elitism at the top end, where civil servants and other people get excellent redundancy payments.

Mr. Butler: Within whatever elite the hon. Member wishes to call the vanguard of the proletariat—I suppose these days Arthur Scargill sees that as the National Union of Mineworkers — even within the various classes of working people or within what sociologists would call socio-economic groups, an elite has emerged — those who work in the mining industry. It causes resentment among other workers in industries which are more hard-pressed than mining on redundancies. We should hold on to the payments which we propose for shipbuilding employees.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked a number of interesting questions. The Department does not lack sympathy for Cammell Laird or for Merseyside. The area continues to receive the maximum regional assistance backed by the Department's best efforts. Birkenhead has received £174 million in regional aid since 1979. Ministers do not prefer any one shipyard to another.

Mr. Field: I was not asking for details of the aid going to Birkenhead. If I wanted that information, I would table a question. I was putting to the Minister the feeling in the yard about orders which are to be placed shortly. It appears that the Department is arguing against the interests of Cammell Laird. I wanted a yes or no answer.

Mr. Butcher: No. We want the contracts to be awarded on a fair and objective basis. We want them to go to those yards which are best equipped and which can deliver on time, within the budget. The House should be familiar with those requirements. We have no preference for any shipyard. The future of Cammell Laird, like that of any other yard, depends upon the ability of the work force to deliver the goods on time.

Mr. Field: I understand that to be part of the Government's policy, but the Government have also stressed that one of their aims is to change industrial attitudes. Some people, the Minister included, have said that attitudes have changed at Cammell Laird. Is the Minister now saying that that is of no concern to the Government when they place orders?

Mr. Butcher: Attitudes are changing in all major shipyards. There has been a great improvement. Of course those factors are taken into consideration when we consider placing orders. Is the hon. Member for Birkenhead saying that the change of attitudes in his constituency is greater than anywhere else and that therefore the order should be placed there? Some of his hon. Friends may also assert that admirable proposition. The orders will be placed objectively, on merit, in the yards which the Ministry of Defence believes can best satisfy its contracts.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead and the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) asked about distributing sale documents to hon. Members. They asked to see copies of the warship yard documents. Those documents cannot be widely distributed, because they are not full prospectuses. It would be illegal to distribute them to members of the public. However, there is no reason why they should not be seen by hon. Members with constituency interests in warship yard privatisation. We shall write to hon. Members accordingly. One could say that that is tonight's exercise in open government.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) asked a raft of questions. Before I answer them, I shall deal with Swan Hunter and Vosper Thornycroft. British Shipbuilders' decision on redundancies is the unfortunate

reflection of the declining workloads in those yards and the continuing failure to obtain export orders. It is in no way connected with privatisation. British Shipbuilders would have had to declare the redundancies even if the warship yards had not been privatised. The decision makes no assumption about where the orders for the next type 22 frigates will be placed.

The redundancies at both yards will follow a progressive rundown pattern. At Swan Hunter, employment levels will fall by 2,100, to 5,250, by the end of February 1985. At Vosper Thornycroft, employment will be down by 790 to 3,600 by the end of April 1985. British Shipbuilders will, of course, try to achieve as many as possible of the redundancies by voluntary means, including transfers and retraining for other jobs. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) asked about that.

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Butcher: I must press on, so I ask that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East be the last Opposition Member to intervene.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Can the Minister explain why the Government have delayed placing the orders for the type 22?

Mr. Butcher: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a further three or four minutes, I shall deal with that in my own main remarks instead of in this question and answer session.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) raised the spectre of a plot to ease people out of the industry in order to fatten the balance sheets of the industry for denationalisation. It is legitimate for Opposition Members to probe and ask questions of the Government. That is their time-honoured role. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman indulged in scaremongering. By putting a warped interpretation on the details of this innocuous Bill he hoped to raise a spectre. There is no reason at present to believe that British Shipbuilders will need to declare deck-clearing redundancies in the warship yards. Redundancies, including those recently announced at Swan Hunter and Vosper Thornycroft, are caused by the absence of orders.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also raised fears about the position of those in the warship yards as privatisation approaches. He said that employees would have an option to take redundancy before privatisation and that they would rush to do that. That is nonsense. Employees can take redundancy only when volunteers are called for. Employees cannot take advantage of redundancy if it is not offered.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether British Shipbuilders' employees would be worse off after 1986. There is no reason to suppose that they will. Employees will negotiate terms with the management and I presume that they will aim to equal or better the present terms. We cannot say tonight what the outcome of negotiations will be. As elsewhere in industry, the outcome will be the result of negotiation. We shall be asking British Shipbuilders and Harland and Wolff to set the negotiations in hand in good time.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Minister accept that employees in British Shipbuilders must be worse off after 1986 because they will not have the guarantee of the scheme which will be stopped in 1986? The Minister has accused me of raising false fears about the future of the shipbuilding industry. Can he guarantee that no redundancies will be declared prior to privatisation in any of the yards which are to be privatised? In the absence of any solid guarantee from the Minister, I shall persist in making the allegation which I was entitled to make.

Mr. Butcher: Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, if he were at the Dispatch Box, he could not give that guarantee? He has been in the House and in high office long enough to know that it is impossible to give such a guarantee. No Labour Minister could have done it, and no Conservative Minister can do it. We cannot look into a crystal ball and know now what the order position will be. However, we can say that we shall encourage British Shipbuilders to come to its arrangements by negotiation with the work force for whatever scheme it wishes to see continued after the deadline for this scheme. That is a perfectly reasonable and legitimate proposition to place before the House. No doubt Opposition Members will wish to test it in Committee when we have more detailed debates on this small Bill.

With regard to extending the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme beyond 1986, I hope that Opposition Members will deploy their arguments later, but tonight I hope that I can assure hon. Members on both sides of the House that there is no plot to produce a flood of redundancies against any time scale and that, as ever, redundancies — those sad decisions — are made predominantly in the light of the position of order books, the health of the site and its objectives for the future.

What about the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about fairness to the private sector? Frankly, I found it particularly galling. It is strange that he should take that line when it was his Administration who decided in the first place that there would not be provision for the private sector. It has not been a mark of Labour party concern in the past to see the full-blooded health of private sector competitors to publicly owned industries. However, when the scheme ends, there will be full equality between the public sector and the private sector. There is pressure from some of my hon. Friends to bring about that equality at a much earlier date. It will happen, and it will happen because we shall have a rationalised industry on which we can consolidate, hoping that the recession in shipbuilding orders will come to an end.

The right hon. Member for Govan referred to the intervention fund. As the House knows, on 2 November the Industry Council agreed to the extension for a further two years, until the end of 1986, of the fifth directive on aid to shipbuilding. That means that we have overcome a major obstacle to our efforts to secure the Commission's approval to an enhancement of the intervention fund regime. However, we could not reach a satisfactory agreement with the outgoing Commission on our application to increase the level of intervention fund support, so my hon. Friend the Minister of State will soon be knocking on the door of the new Commissioners to re-emphasise our reasonable and sensible proposals.

Two hon. Members referred to the type 22 frigates in a slightly different context. I say again to the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is considering the tenders for those vessels and hopes to announce his decisions shortly. We fully recognise the importance of those orders to the three contending yards

[Mr. Butcher]

—Cammell Laird, Swan Hunter and Vosper Thornycroft. We equally recognise the concern in each at the time that it has taken to reach a decision, but it is essential that in reaching it we take fully into account all the factors, including the requirements of the Navy, the cost to the taxpayer, the performance of the yards and their need for work. No doubt the factor mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh will be uppermost in the minds of all three yards. Of course we welcome the dramatic improvement in the atmosphere and the sense of responsibility in Cammell Laird, but we cannot tell the House tonight the precise date on which that decision will be made, although it will be shortly.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We must be clear about this matter. Is the Minister telling the House that the decision on where the orders for those two type 22s are placed will not be based solely on commercial considerations?

Mr. Butcher: The decision will be based on the judgment of the Secretary of State for Defence of the ability of the yards to complete those ships on spec, on time and within the contract price. In other words, it will be an objective decision on merit, and on commercial grounds, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to call it that.

At long last, I come to the raft of questions raised by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North. He had the courtesy to write to my hon. Friend the Minister of State requesting that the closure of the BS(ETS) manufacturing facility be postponed for three months while the current investigation into the alternatives to closure is completed. My hon. Friend replied that, while that was primarily a management matter for British Shipbuilders, he had looked into the position. He assured the hon. Gentleman that only those assets that British Shipbuilders needed to keep for its Wallsend site would be removed from BS(ETS), that British Shipbuilders intended to sell the unit as a whole if a buyer could be found, and that closure would not seriously prejudice the chances of a new operation starting up there. The House will agree that British Shipbuilders is going out of its way to be as helpful as possible on the issue and is acting with a judicious blend of commercial and social responsibility.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the development of the Doxford engine and said that there was a recent suggestion in *Lloyd's List* that British Shipbuilders is secretly continuing development work on the engine. I am assured by the corporation that that report is wrong. Work on the new engine stopped 18 months ago. It was clear that there was insufficient demand to justify the investment, and British Shipbuilders tried to interest private sector companies in sharing the risk or taking over the work. I regret to inform the House that no one was prepared to do so.

I refer to the general question of the future of BS(ETS). We all naturally regret the closure of the crankshaft and engine-building operation and the redundancies that that has meant, but those were strictly commercial decisions that were forced on British Shipbuilders. The investment in the crankshaft facility was, with hindsight, an error of commercial judgment on the part of management at the time. British Shipbuilders has never achieved, nor is it likely to achieve, the levels of engine throughput that would justify such a facility, and the only sensible thing to do was to close it and, in its view, stop throwing good money after bad. I know that that will seem a harsh observation to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North, but those are the realities as advised to us before the debate.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will draw some encouragement from the interest shown by Tyne and Wear county council. Since the decisions were made several parties, including the hon. Gentleman and the county council, have been active in seeking support and funds to enable all or part of BS(ETS) to continue. British Shipbuilders is extending what help it can to the advisers acting for the group in evaluating the possibilities. I hope that something will emerge from that approach, but I also hope that it will be a commercial solution with a long-term future and not an uncommercial rescue operation funded solely by the ratepayers of Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Clay: Does not the Minister accept that if those efforts, which he recognises, are to have any chance of coming to fruition, the work force must still be there? The workers are capable of developing the works in the way that various companies might want to develop them. It is not true that British Shipbuilders is assisting. It has taken a long time to get the Department of Trade and Industry and British Shipbuilders to take any interest in the approaches that have been made. There has been little co-operation, and it does not help potential buyers if the workers who are left are being either threatened or bribed out of the works and if British Shipbuilders' management seems to have an interest in nothng but closing the works. The picture that the Minister presents of the interest being shown by companies is true, but the picture of co-operation that he is presenting is not.

Mr. Butcher: I shall have to agree to differ on that point. It would appear from the level of activity that is reported to the Department that genuine attempts have been made to resolve the problem, but hard commercial facts have intervened. That particular site apparently cannot obtain the amount of business required for either existing or future management to survive.

Mr. Clay *rose*——

Mr. Butcher: I must press on.

I should like to deal with the hon. Gentleman's fifth question, about the Ethiopian order. I gave an undertaking to write to him personally, and I shall discharge it as soon as I can. I can say tonight that British Shipbuilders is proceeding as quickly as possible to put together a financial package acceptable to the customer for an order for two general-purpose cargo vessels from Ethiopia, and if successful it would go to Austin and Pickersgill.

British Shipbuilders is also pursuing a number of other prospects for the yard, but I am bound to say that, in view of Ethiopia's economic position, export credits in respect of that country present certain difficulties. With my Department's support, however, British Shipbuilders has identified arrangements which could offer means of resolving the problems. British Shipbuilders is pursuing that matter urgently.

There are three options for St. Helena—an SD14, a small ship or continued use of the existing ship. I regret to inform the House that, contrary to the views that were put forward in our recent debate on shipbuilding, it is not just a question of another SD14 being ordered or not, or

of any particular time scale. There are as yet unresolved options. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is considering these options.

I appreciate the urgent need for orders for Austin and Pickersgill, but of equal importance to St. Helena is a decision which will suit its requirements. Nevertheless, I shall continue to press the urgency of the matter upon my right hon. Friend.

The proposal to extend the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme embodied in the Bill——

Mr. Millan: I asked about the Turkish order for Govan Shipbuilders. I hope that the Minister can give an assurance that, if necessary, the Government stand ready to achieve that order for Govan Shipbuilders.

Mr. Butcher: The short answer is yes.

The Bill should have the support of both sides of the House. It is, to use my hon. Friend's words, an innocuous Bill. In effect, it continues a policy launched by Opposition Members. I hope, therefore, that the Bill will receive the support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

SHIPBUILDING BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Shipbuilding Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) any increase in sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other enactment attributable to extending the period in respect of which schemes under the Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Act 1978 have effect from eight years to nine years and six months, and

(b) the extinguishment of all outstanding liabilities in respect of the loan made by the Shipbuilding Industry Board to Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Limited under section 4 of the Shipbuilding Industry Act 1967.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

UNDERTAKINGS ON DISPOSAL

'Where the Commission disposes of land which is or is likely to be used for commercial or industrial purposes:

(1) It shall obtain from the transferee and its successors in title an undertaking that the transferee shall:

(a) act reasonably and fairly towards any person who is a tenant of such land; and

(b) That in particular the transferee will not:

(i) seek to enforce any covenant to repair where the repair involves the reparation of an inherent defect in the construction of the building erected by the Commission or its predecessor in title;

(ii) impose or enforce any rent review clause in such a way as to demand a greater amount of rent than would be awarded by a court on the renewal of lease under Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954.

(iii) enforce any liability against an original lessee who has assigned his interest with the consent of the reversioner;

(iv) unreasonably refuse consent for alterations or a change of user;

(v) seek any new direct covenant from an assignee as a condition of a licence to assign;

(vi) seek from any tenant an undertaking to be responsible for the lessor's costs whether a matter proceeds to completion or not.

(2) It shall first offer to dispose of the land to the tenant.'.—*[Mr. John Fraser.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.42 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This Administration's aim is to achieve the naked state. When I say "naked state", I do not mean something that is like the Garden of Eden. I mean the naked state that is more appropriate to the Government's lack of any sense of shame. I mean it in the sense that it is stripped of any public assets. The Bill is part of a striptease process, because it facilitates the disposal by the Commission for the New Towns of its public assets.

The new clause addresses itself to the way in which the Commission for the New Towns disposes of its industrial and commercial land and to whom. One great difference between public and private ownership is accountability. If the Commission for the New Towns, or any other public landowner, abuses its position or power it can ultimately be called to account in the House of Commons, it can be examined by a Select Committee, and Ministers can be questioned and have to justify their decisions to the House of Commons. A local authority has to justify its decision to its electors. However, a private owner—the Bill talks about handing over commercial land to private owners —of commercial, industrial or residential land is under no obligation to consider any kind of public accountability. His obligations are towards his shareholders or investors and not to the tenant, the community or any wider industrial or commercial interests.

A good example of that point is St. George's hospital. When St. George's hospital at Hyde park corner was

[Mr. John Fraser]

owned by the National Health Service, we could ask questions in the House about the use of that land and its value to the community. When the lease lapsed and it went into the hands of the Duke of Westminster and the Grosvenor estate, there was no longer any opportunity for Members to ask in the House about a valuable public asset in the centre of London which remains empty and unused. That is a good example of the difference between public accountability and private ownership. The lack of accountability of the private landlord and the institutional investor needs to be counterbalanced by legal obligations.

There are three dangers inherent in the Commission for the New Towns handing over its commercial land to private hands. First, there is the danger that properties will be sold over the heads of those tenants who wish to buy. The Government are in favour of the right to buy for residential tenants. We shall not go into that issue this evening. I am in favour, as are many other hon. Members, of the right of the commercial tenant, whether he is a small shopkeeper, a factory owner or large institution, to have the first offer to buy his reversion from the Commission for the New Towns before the land is sold to a property company or anyone else.

If it is the judgment of the commercial tenant that his business or the production of goods or services is better served by the industrial or service producer owning the freehold, I believe that his judgment should be paramount, provided that he can find the money and pay the market value, and that there is no loss to public funds. He should have first option of buying his reversion before it passes into any private landlord's hands. Part of the new clause deals with that issue.

The country's future does not lie in property companies owning land; it lies in the production of wealth by way of goods and services. If the private tenant, whether he is a small shopkeeper, industrialist, professional or provider of services, wants to buy and believes that that is in the interests of production, he should be allowed to exercise that right.

Mr. Warren Hawksley (The Wrekin): I do not see anything in the new clause to say that the sale should be at market value. Perhaps we can have clarification of how the valuation should be arrived at for a tenant to purchase.

Mr. Fraser: I thought for a moment that the hon. Gentleman was afraid that the Government might do another British Telecom with the commission's land. It is implicit in the new clause that the land will be sold at market value. There is no deviation from that general principle.

If the commercial tenant wishes to be free of the tedious supervision, restrictions and extraction of fees, charges and rent by his landlord, he should have the opportunity to buy his reversion. If a commercial tenant in a new town wants a private landlord off his back, and if he is prepared to pay good money for that purpose, he should be allowed to do so. I hope that when he replies to the debate the Minister will give an undertaking—this matter can be achieved by an undertaking—that he will require the commission, before it disposes of its commercial land assets, to give first offer at market value to the commercial tenants who occupy the land. That would deal with the danger of the land being sold over the heads of private tenants.

There is a second danger inherent in the sale of new towns land. There is a risk that new towns could become private company towns, with one or two private landlords only wielding monopolistic powers. Once again the Minister could deal with that problem by giving an undertaking that under no circumstances will a few private landlords be allowed to purchase the commercial assets of any new town.

We understand from a cutting from the *Birmingham Evening Mail* of 28 December 1984 that the Government have prevented or persuaded Redditch development corporation not to sell its commercial assets to one or two companies only. There is a fear that a great many commercial assets could be put into the hands of one or two small property companies. I hope that the Minister will give an undertaking that that danger will be avoided.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that Redditch is in my constituency and that I have taken a close interest in the matter to which he has referred. The Government's position, as I understand it, is that there is no objection in principle to the disposal of assets at an acceptable price and valuation to one, two or however many bidders. It is up to the individual bidders to make acceptable, reasonable and fair bids for assets in new towns for them to be accepted. Therefore, I do not believe that the result of the transaction referred to by the hon. Gentleman is as he suggested.

Mr. Fraser: If that is not the case, I am giving too much credit to the Government. There ought to be other considerations, apart from price. It is wrong that the predominant amount of land in a new town should be in the hands of one or two private companies. I am not in favour, in principle, of selling off the land, but if it is to be sold it is wrong that there should be a single, private, unaccountable company controlling the commercial land in that area. It would be very much better, if the land is to be sold, for the Commission for the New Towns to wait for bids for different parcels of land, so that there is at least a variety of private landlords and some degree of choice as between one commercial letting and another. It should not be put into the hands of one single estate. One knows of the risk of abuse which has arisen in the past as a result of large land ownerships by, for example, the Church Commissioners or the Grosvenor estate.

Mr. Forth: May I also clarify this point. In Redditch, the example which has been taken, the shopping centre has already been disposed of at a fair and agreed price to a different set of landlords. The development corporation has had a disposals programme under way for many years. Large parts of the town are already owned by many different holders. I ask the hon. Member to clarify how he defines the parameters of what he is suggesting—one, or a few, or not too many, the whole town or part of the town. I do not believe that what the hon. Gentleman says has any meaning, because Redditch is a good example of the approach which he has suggested.

Mr. Fraser: In such a short space of time I cannot lay down a universal rule, but what I am arguing is that there should not be a sale by the Commission for the New Towns of the land in any new town to a small number of landlords. If the hon. Gentleman says that in Redditch there is a wide variety of landlords, one welcomes that, but

what one is trying to do is to continue to have a choice and, if it exists, some degree of competition among the commercial landlords. That is the point that I am making. I believe that our future lies in having, not a nation of landlords, but a nation of people who are producing goods.

I deal next with the third danger that flows from the disposal of lands by the Commission for the New Towns. This is the way in which commercial tenants will be exposed to the abuse of power inherent in ownership by large property companies, including the insurance companies, investment trusts and other trust funds—what I call, in shorthand terms, the institutional landlord. The new clause would protect tenants from some abuses by institutional landlords. I believe that the balance between the commercial landlord and the commercial tenant is unfairly weighted in favour of the landlord and that landlords are sometimes—though not universally so—arrogant and insensitive and abuse the imbalance of power which exists between an institutional landlord and a commercial tenant. Incidentally, I am not dealing with the transfer of residential land which would normally be passed to local authorities.

The whole purpose of an intitutional, commercial landlord is to squeeze every possible penny which he can get out of his tenant. The process of production has nothing very much to do with the commercial landlord. Indeed, people could go to shareholders' meetings or to meetings of a pension fund and complain that the institutional landlord had not extracted the last possible advantage out of his tenants. That is the whole purpose of his existence. A landlord could be accused of dereliction of duty by not extracting the greatest amount that he could get from his tenants.

I believe it is wrong that institutions in Britain prefer to invest only in the safest and most secure factor of production, instead of putting their money into all factors of production. We see more and more money going into the ownership of land and buildings, instead of the institutions taking the whole spread of risks involved in the production of goods and services.

The new clause tries to deal with some of the abuses, which, in my view, are on the increase. For instance, it will impose upon an institutional landlord or upon anybody who acquires land from the Commission for the New Towns the duty to act fairly and reasonably towards any tenant of that land. I believe that that ought to be the overriding obligation of a landlord. He needs a return on his capital, but he ought to have regard to general standards of fairness and equity as between the landlord and the tenant. Therefore, there should not be a fastidious enforcement of repairing covenants, which often amount to little more than a surveyor's bonanza to obtain money out of the tenant of commercial premises.

Secondly, when the Commission for the New Towns sells its commercial land it should obtain an undertaking from the purchaser not to seek to enforce any covenant to repair where the repair involves reparation of an inherent defect. Let me give the House an idea of the abuses that take place. There have been a number of cases where a commercial landlord has built office buildings or other industrial buildings with external cladding, so the reponsibility for the erection of the building is solely that of the institutional landlord. The premises are then let on a full repairing lease to a commercial tenant. After a while the cladding begins to fall off. Sometimes the cost of reparation will amount to millions of pounds, yet the courts have decided that because of the way in which our property law works the obligation to repair belongs not to the landlord who built an inherently unstable structure but to the tenant.

There have been other cases where institutional landlords have erected buildings with unsafe heating systems. They have contained asbestos fibres. Despite the fact that the landlord has not delivered the goods, the consequences of that failure are then visited upon the tenant. I feel strongly about this, because I assisted the passage through the House of what is now the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977. Under that Act, if one is dealing with goods rather than with land and buildings, one has to deliver one's promise. It is not possible, with some limitations, to contract out of one's basic liability that the goods supplied should be of merchantable quality and reasonably fit for the purpose for which they are required.

With landlords, it is a different matter. Institutional landlords—indeed, landlords generally—have escaped almost entirely from their obligations, without tenants having any recourse to law. As between those who are trying to produce goods or services in this country and who are having a pretty hard time of it during a world recession, and those who have a vast amount of money to invest in reversions to industrial properties, the balance of advantage ought to lie with the tenant who takes the risk rather than with the landlord who takes very little risk. The most extreme case is the one where the landlord is responsible for an inherent defect in a building and yet visits the consequences of his own neglect upon the tenant. Part of the new clause would prevent that from happening—at any rate in those cases where property had been acquired from the commission.

Another abuse is when a landlord introduces a rent review clause into a commercial lease. Even though the lease may have only three or four years to run at the time of the rent review, the landlord insists upon having the rent fixed by an arbitrator on the assumption that the period of the lease will be 21 years, whereas in reality the unexpired period of the lease is only three or four years. When the lease comes to its complete end, the tenant is able, by way of arbitration, to go to the county court to have the rent fixed at a fair market value under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. I see no reason why rent review clauses as they are now being developed should circumvent the will of the House as laid down in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. That is the reason for a further limb of the new clause.

Another unfair abuse, is the visiting of a liability upon an original lessee. For example, there may be a small business man who, perhaps 20 years ago, took a workshop on an industrial estate on a 21-year lease and set up in business as a small business man, and was successful. As a result of that success, perhaps after three or four years, he assigned his lease to another industrialist and went into bigger premises because his business had grown. Yet 21 years later, if the final occupant of the premises defaults on his obligations, either by non-payment of rent or by failure to repair, the liability that accrues 21 years after the lease was granted and 17 years after the original lessee has left the building can nevertheless be visited on the original lessee. That is an unfair balance between the landlord and the tenant.

The rule that an original lessee is liable throughout the whole lease for payment of rent and observance of

[Mr. Fraser]

performance of the covenants should be swept away. We have an opportunity to do that at least in respect of land that is disposed of by the commission.

8 pm

In a society where industrial processes are changing and public taste changes more rapidly than ever, there is no reason why a landlord should unreasonably refuse a change of use or an alteration to premises. There might be justifiable reasons, but if a man who has been manufacturing, say, manual calculating machines finds that the market for them has declined and he wants to develop another product, there is no reason why the institutional landlord should be able to hold him to ransom and demand a premium as a condition of agreeing to a change of use of the premises or the making of an alteration.

There is also no reason why there should be a bonanza in professional fees following licences to assign becoming unduly lengthy and fees being demanded from tenants who are allowed to assign leases.

Those are all general abuses and I should like to see all of them removed. We should right the balance between the commercial tenant and the commercial landlord.

At least we can deal with some of the abuses in the sale of public land covered by the Bill, where the Government have the power to set a higher standard. If the Government reject the new clause, they will show that their sympathies lie not with commercial tenants or those who are trying to innovate and produce to increase the wealth of the country, but with the commercial landlords who play a much smaller part in the process of production than do those who have the hard job of paying the rent and trying to run a business.

The Minister for Housing and Construction (Mr. Ian Gow): It may be convenient if I comment first on what the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said about Redditch. He was correct in saying that the Government have decided that the sale that had been suggested should not be proceeded with in the way proposed.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to the chairman of the Redditch development corporation on 13 December:

"The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that tenants have the opportunity to buy the property which they rent . . . in spite of what the prospective purchasers said, a risk must remain that this opportunity would be less than would be offered by an agency under direct Government control."

I also remind the House of what my hon. Friend said on Second Reading. I repeat the assurance that he gave:

"there are several safeguards for which Ministers would look before they gave their consent. For example, existing tenants of industrial and commercial property would want to continue to have good opportunities to buy their premises. We would insist on that."

The hon. Member for Norwood expressed anxiety about the possibility of a single purchaser being able to acquire substantial blocks of property from the commission. That has not happened. Since 1979, about £500 million of commercial and industrial assets have been sold. About £300 million of the sales were made by the commission and the other £200 million were made by the development corporations. Those sales have involved many individual transactions. The £50 million realised by the commission in 1983-84 was the product of about 180 separate sales, two thirds of which were to sitting tenants or other local interests. Five of the sales were to consortia of tenants, involving about 50 tenants.

The hon. Member for Norwood will have read the report of the commission for 1983-84 which said that if properties are to be offered to the investment market, the commissioners, as a matter of policy, ensure that their tenants are informed three months in advance, with an indication of the approximate sum expected by the commission's agents, so that they have a reasonable opportunity to negotiate finance or consortium arrangements and to seek to reach agreement with the commission.

We are bringing into the property market the forces of a true market place. On Second Reading, Opposition Members criticised my phrase

"magic of the market place"—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1984, Vol. 68, c. 163-230.]

but it is that magic, within the framework of the general law, which will provide the best protection for present tenants of the commission. I repeat that the Government have required the commission to give tenants the first opportunity to buy the freehold of their properties. Alternatively, they can remain as tenants under existing leases, and if they remain as tenants and the freehold is sold, the landlord will have a clear incentive to continue to let on reasonable and fair terms. The investor will want to ensure that his investment keeps its value. Much of the value depends on having a thriving tenant who is able and willing to pay the rent. No purchaser wants to buy a series of law suits with unwilling tenants. Therefore, it is in the purchaser's interests to make sure that the tenant receives fair treatment.

The intention of the new clause is misconceived. Rather than attempt to fetter the discretion of the commission in realising the assets, we should recognise that the general law on landlords and commercial tenants, and the forces of the market, apply in new towns as much as they do elsewhere. There is no reason to single out former tenants of the Commission for the New Towns for special treatment.

The new clause ignores the truth that every tenancy is the result of a separate commercial negotiation. The lease records the bargain struck by the two parties in the light of all the circumstances. Neither party can alter that agreement unilaterally. If the commission sells a property subject to a lease, the tenant remains entitled to the protection of the lease into which he has entered or to which he is the assignee. In particular, he will be able to take advantage of independent arbitration to settle the level of any rent review that cannot be agreed, since that is the normal basis of the commission's leases. It is not sensible to attempt to rewrite those leases with a few words of statute, because the leases reflect a vast variety of circumstances.

Even if there were no other objection to the new clause, it would not achieve the objective of its supporters. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) mentioned subsection (2):

"It shall first offer to dispose of the land to the tenant."

There is nothing there about open market value. The clause also says:

"the transferee shall . . . act reasonably and fairly towards any person who is a tenant of such land".

That is an invitation — which the hon. Member for Norwood and I should not be the first to complain about —for more work to be put the way of the lawyers.

The new clause would require the commission to obtain undertakings from any purchasers of property. No doubt the commission would be able to enforce such undertakings, at least against the original purchaser, but tenants would not be parties to the agreement. Consequently, their locus to enforce such undertakings would be extremely doubtful. We should not change the normal law simply in the case of purchasers from the commission.

For those reasons, I cannot advise the House to accept the new clause.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 12

FINANCIAL LIMIT FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 13, line 16, leave out '"£600 million"' and insert '"£550 million"'.

I tabled amendment No. 1 for two reasons. First, it gives us an opportuniy to focus our attention upon a somewhat anomalous part of the Bill—the single clause that deals with the urban development corporations, of which there are only two. I am myself concerned mainly with the London Docklands development corporation. Within the wider framework of a Bill dealing with the new towns commission, the urban development corporations might well be overlooked. That would be a great mistake. It is right for us to seize any opportunities to consider how the urban development corporations are carrying out their redevelopment functions in the London and Liverpool docklands.

Secondly, by changing the figure from £600 million to £550 million we would bring forward the time when it would be necessary for the Secretary of State to seek an affirmative resolution in order to gain for the UDCs the additional sums of money that they will require.

In connection with accountability and the affairs of the UDCs, we should remember that the LDDC, at least, is quite distinct from all the previous new town, expanded town and other corporations set up in the past, especially in that the proposal was from the beginning strongly opposed by the local councils. No agreement was worked out with them, as it was in the case of Peterborough, Northampton or other established towns on to which new town corporations were grafted. Nor can the corporations be compared in any sense with the new town corporations set up in earlier post-war years on green field sites. There is still a strong feeling of resentment within the communities, and people are anxious that Parliament should exercise its powers of scrutiny, whenever possible, over the affairs of the LDDC. This is such an opportunity.

8.15 pm

I shall not consider the whole range of the LDDC's work. Its annual report was published last June or July and gave some account—though it was a glossy document designed with public relations in mind—of what the corporation had been up to during the preceding year.

There are some developments that I welcome. I welcome the advance, in agreement with the GLC, towards a light transit system which would greatly improve communications in an area that suffers badly from lack of communications. I am thinking not just of my own borough of Tower Hamlets, but of the adjacent boroughs of Newham and of Southwark and Lewisham to the south.

We would all welcome that development, but other areas are more controversial. For instance, there is the proposed development of the STOLport. We await the result of the inquiry. The findings were set before the Secretary of State some months ago, but I understand that he has subsequently asked certain questions of the parties concerned. Whether by doing so he has made it necessary to reopen the inquiry is a matter on which I look forward to hearing the views of the Minister.

The area of LDDC policy that is of the greatest concern to my constituents in Tower Hamlets and above all to people living in the dock area and Wapping is housing in which there has been a truly remarkable development. New town or development corporations have been set up in many areas, and it is generally been not only the stated claim but the generally accepted view that in promoting house building the corporations were serving the needs of local people. In the case of Wapping, such a claim would have to be seriously scrutinised. It may well be—the situation is almost unique—that of the many attractive and desirable houses that will be built virtually none will be available for the people who live in Wapping or in the rest of Tower Hamlets. The reason is not that people do not wish to buy the houses — which are, of course, overwhelmingly, built for sale. It is that they cannot afford to buy them at the prices that will be demanded.

I have engaged in lengthy arguments with the LDDC's chairman and chief executive about their policy of building houses for sale in Wapping. As a result of pressure brought to bear upon the LDDC by myself and others, it conducted a survey, and a report entitled "Living in Wapping" was published in July 1984. In response to my request that the LDDC should attempt to find out whether people in Wapping would be able to buy the houses which it proposed to build—especially in the Western dock area, the first large tranche of new house building—it carried out a substantial survey. It discovered that 70 per cent. of the people in Wapping would like to buy if they could. Of those, some 47 per cent. would be able to buy if they did not have to pay more than £150 a month. If they had to pay as much as £250 a month in mortgage and rate payments—in that area of Wapping, rent and rates are aggregated together—only 6 per cent. would be able to buy.

One has only to consider the cost of house building in dockland and the price of houses there to see that the people are faced with a major problem.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the right hon. Gentleman elucidate one point? How can he say that, in private accommodation, rent and rates are aggregated? If the development is to be a private one, why are those amounts aggregated? If sky-high rates are imposed by an inefficient local authority, of course costs will be high.

Mr. Shore: I merely aggregated the amount in the terms of a survey of affordability that takes account of rate payments as well as payments for servicing the mortgage. As today there is a tendency to pay the rent and rates together, the sums were taken together. That is simply a point of explanation.

[Mr. Shore]

That is the background against which one must consider the prices of the houses being built in Western dock. Although the corporation has done its best to maintain that people are queuing up to buy houses in Beckton and Surrey docks — my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) may wish to comment on that— the corporation admits that in Wapping the situation will be a damn sight more difficult. According to the annual report,

"because of its location immediately to the east and within walking distance of the City, the corporation has always known that prices in Wapping would be higher and, without action, probably out of the range of the sort of local people who have been buying elsewhere".

It can say that again about the houses being out of range.

It is unlikely that a house will be built in the Western dock area for less than £40,000. The corporation uses that figure in its annual report. I am informed that someone who wanted to get a mortgage for £40,000 would probably have to pay 11·75 per cent. interest. Allowing for a tax rebate, that would mean monthly payments of about £330 over a 25-year term. I remind the House that only 6 per cent. of those people who wanted to buy a house in the area are able to afford £250 a month. That should be compared with the £330 a month required to service a mortgage of £40,000. I fear therefore that very few people from Wapping or Tower Hamlets will be able to buy the houses.

That is a scandal and a tragedy. When the docks moved down the river towards Tilbury and beyond and the old enclosed dock systems became available for other uses, the borough of Tower Hamlets and other dockland boroughs were presented with a historic opportunity to deal with some of the worst housing problems in Britain. At last land was becoming available. We had every hope and expectation that such problems would be solved by using a substantial part of the land that had become free. However, we are still saddled with a serious, and increasing, housing problem while the free housing land has been transferred by vesting orders to the LDDC, which is knowingly building houses at prices which are beyond the reach of the people of the borough.

The extra sums of money which are being made available to the development corporations in London and Liverpool contrast most unfavourably with the continued reduction in the residual housing investment programme money for building houses for rent, for repairs and for modernisation which is available to borough councils. At constant prices, the housing investment programme has fallen in the past five years from £20 million a year to £11·6 million a year in Tower Hamlets. That reduction is occurring when there are large numbers of homeless families, often Bengali, who must live in bed and breakfast accommodation and seedy hotels in west London or Islington. We also have vast new problems of disrepair in our housing stock such as have been revealed by the discovery of deterioration in Ronan Point type buildings in Tower Hamlets. Moreover, we have the growing problems of asbestos being found in many buildings while ordinary repairs are being carried out.

Mr. Forth: The right hon. Gentleman is drawing a fascinating distinction between the resources that are available to development corporations and those which are available to local authorities in housing. Would he care to relate his comments to the argument that the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) deployed about accountability and discuss accountability for funds that are available to development corporations and their use?

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) made the point succinctly. He said that the purpose of public ownership of land and resources is to ensure that its use is accountable and that the matter can be brought before the House. New towns have always enjoyed special status but they are accountable, as are urban development corporations. Some are less accountable than others. Because urban development corporations have no master plan and had no public inquiry before they were set up, they are perhaps less accountable and have gone through less scrutiny than new towns such as Redditch which the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) represents. Nevertheless, we have had opportunities. This is such a one and we must seize it to insist on public accountability of urban development corporations' actions.

There is a need for radical change in housing policy in the LDDC area. There is also a great need for a change in the balance between building for rent and building for sale. The balance is much too heavily tipped towards building houses for sale. Pursuing such a policy in the pretty secure knowledge that negligible assistance will be given to easing the housing problem of people who live in the area is utterly irresponsible and worthy of censure.

I hope that there will be a rethink. We now have a survey and will therefore be able to check the take-up of houses in the Western dock development by people who live in the borough. If, as I suspect, the numbers are negligible, I hope that Ministers, in spite of their almost obsessive interest in private development, will reconsider and give new instructions to the LDDC.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I endorse everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said about the effect of the London Docklands development corporation. My constituency is not quite as close to the City, but we have had similar experiences. I shall show how the LDDC works to even greater disadvantage in my area.

In this first major debate on the progress of the LDDC since it was set up under the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980, it is appropriate to read from section 136 of the Act:

"(1) The object of an urban development corporation shall be to secure the regeneration of its area.

(2) The object is to be achieved in particular by the following means (or by such of them as seem to the corporation to be appropriate in the case of its area), namely, by bringing land and buildings into effective use, encouraging the development of existing and new industry and commerce, creating an attractive environment and ensuring that housing and social facilities are available to encourage people to live and work in the area."

As my right hon. Friend said, there was much argument about an urban development corporation. There was a three-month hearing by a Select Committee of another place before the necessary statutory instrument was laid before this House. Despite the fact that Newham covers half of the LDDC's area and although I represent half the area, the legislation is so draconian that I was not able to participate in the debate which established the LDDC. The Minister will therefore understand if my remarks take longer tonight.

8.30 pm

The Select Committee of another place made a number of recommendations and observations, and its findings were published in paper 198 in 1980. I particularly draw attention to paragraph 8.7 because it exercises an acid test which I shall use later:

"This leads the Committee to a final point. It is obvious—and the Chairman designate fully recognised—that if a UDC is to be a success it is essential that it establishes *and maintains good relations with the local authorities and their officers, and avails itself of their advice and expertise*. The Code of consultation, provided for under *section 140* of the Act, should ensure that this is so. The UDC must *also win the confidence of local organisations*. It must always *let the Docklands Forum know what it is thinking of doing*, so that they can express their views on any proposal and it must make it clear that such views, even if not accepted, are always seriously considered."

The Docklands Forum has said that it does not believe that it knows what the LDDC is doing. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, in many instances I do not know what the LDDC is up to in my own constituency. As the Secretary of State is accountable to hon. Members, he will appreciate that it is difficult for outside organisations to know what is going on.

The Chairman of that Committee, Lord Cross, made some additional remarks—I think in a judicial capacity—when the constitution order was debated in another place. On 1 July, at column 214, of *Hansard*, he said that the preponderant need in dockland was for publicly owned housing. However, we all know that that is not what the LDDC has in the end emphasised in that area of housing for which it is responsible. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has already illustrated that in the context of Stepney.

Vast areas of Newham were available for development. That land, instead of being made available for up to 20,000 people in mixed tenancies—about two thirds public to about one third private and housing association—was drastically changed to more or less all private. The terms of the land value transaction were not entirely clear, despite Sir Laurie Barratt's remarks in the *Evening Standard*, nor have they been since. But I am obliged to the Minister for some clarification of this matter in a letter that he sent me in relation to his reply of 25 October 1984 when I asked what adjustments were made by the LDDC to the market price of land sold to house builders. This is a fundamental point.

The LDDC can purchase land compulsorily and sell to private developers who then sell to freeholders. In his reply by letter, the Minister said:

"The value of the land was determined by setting prices for the dwellings and deducting development and overhead costs. The residual value was attributed to the land".

The Minister may be unable fully to amplify that when he replies, but I hope that he will be able to do so at some stage. Not only was most of that land taken for private development, but the price of the land to the developer was not made clear, at least not to the people of the area at the time, and it has remained something of a question since.

The idea was that many of the people who came into these private developments would contribute to the life of the area, and many have. Many hon. Members and many members of the Labour party own their own houses. We do not disagree with that. But the people of Newham object to the change in the proportion of land to be used for certain development, because the need for publicly owned and housing association dwellings is very great. That need was subsequently increased—the Minister knows this only too well—as a result of the difficulties with Ronan Point and Taylor Woodrow-Anglian blocks.

The LDDC almost reversed the priorities. Had this been changed by 30 per cent. one way or the other, the same concern would not have been expressed. I am glad to say that the LDDC has apparently now offered five acres of land to the Newham borough council. The former chairman, Sir Nigel Broackes, made it clear that he would be willing to give more, provided the council had the cash to undertake the building. That, of course, depended on HIP allocations and so on, as a result of which the council on many occasions was unable to build.

Planning applications, although not overall strategic planning, were in the hands of the LDDC. It was the prime planning authority, and it is here that the borough made its main objection. It said, "The dockland area will be organised by the LDDC but we in Newham want it to integrate that planning with the rest of the borough. We want to balance our shopping and recreational facilities to serve the whole community, and Newham, being bounded by river valleys, commons and the River Thames itself, is very much a community. But if we have two planning authorities operating on different criteria, there will be difficulty." That was one of the main objections which the able chief executive made in his evidence to the Select Committee.

Lo and behold, there have been planning difficulties. The London borough of Newham gave planning authority to supermarkets in the dockland area, and the LDDC has now gone further and given more planning authority in a formerly industrial area for retail markets. That may affect the balance of planning and shopping opportunity in the rest of the borough. I could go on from there, because the criteria on which the LDDC operates will not be that of the borough, particularly in respect of industry.

On 7 June last year, I asked a number of questions about the policy of the LDDC in relation to small firms and industrial relocation. Given the Government's proper emphasis on small private enterprise, one might have thought that the LDDC would have gone out of its way to ensure that any necessary displacement was dealt with sympathetically and that it would lean over backwards to do what it could. It may have done so in certain respects, but it is wrong that a Member for Parliament should—as I was on a number of occasions—be brought in to deal with relocation for small firms in his constituency when the mighty operation of the LDDC was available. Unfortunately, such was the case.

The Minister has given some figures on employment, but he will know that a great deal of employment in the dockland area is brought in from outside—for example, in the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney and my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo). I am told that, in the enterprise zone, rents have evened up to take account of the fact that there are no rates.

Therefore, the landlord gains. In the debates on the enterprise zone legislation, some hon. Members predicted that if the magic of the market operated, that would happen. Sure enough, it did. Therefore, the employment figures are not as good as they seem. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will give his estimate of the number of genuine new jobs that have been created which

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

otherwise would not have existed. It may be a small figure; I have yet to hear any estimate from the LDDC or the Government.

If one wishes to make one's views known as a resident of Newham and not as a privileged Member of this House, to whom does one go? The Secretary of State appoints the LDDC board. Whatever its members' experience, occupation or office, they sit on the board as his nominees. Some continue and some do not. They are hired and fired by the Secretary of State. Sometimes we are not given a great deal of notice about who those gentlemen are.

Both the leaders of the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets participate, albeit differently. A press release on 12 November named a gentleman, whom I shall not name but who is no doubt an admirable person, who was being appointed by the Secretary of State to the LDDC. It is precisely five lines and tells us little about him except that he is involved in electronics and computers. I am not saying that there should not be someone with those qualifications on the board, but I complain that that is all we know about him.

It is not adequate for an organisation with planning powers of considerable strength, powers of compulsory purchase and powers of vesting of land—during the past six months there have been propositions which have been difficult for the communities to sustain — to meet in private and to publish an annual report which is partial. The annual report did not even quote the basic statute to which I referred earlier. Therefore, it is difficult for people to have confidence and trust—that word was used in the Select Committee's report—in such an organisation.

Sometimes it is difficult for hon. Members to have confidence and trust even regarding routine matters. In the past I have had the privilege to coach London youngsters on the river Thames. For seven years I coached rowing and water sports. When I went to Newham I thought that we could use the docks. The Port of London Authority provided difficulties, but when the docklands joint committee took them over I thought we were on our way. We had an Amateur Rowing Association regatta in 1983. The London borough of Newham and the LDDC got together and decided to have a young people's boating centre on the west part of the Royal Victoria dock. Negotiations went ahead for leasing a shed there. Everything went well, until I happened to visit the Library and while idly looking through *Motor Boat and Yachting* saw a familiar scene in an advertisement that stated:

"The London Floating Boat Show . . . comes to the Royal Victoria Dock, London, May 3-6, 1985."

The illustration showed the shed where I thought my young people were to have a boating centre. I checked the matter and indeed the plans had been changed. As I understand it, the London borough of Newham was to hear of that through my happening to see that advertisement in the Library.

That is not the right way to proceed. I know that another centre, perhaps an even better one, on another part of the dock has been offered. I hope that it will be both good and permanent. The water is there and is fine. But that is not the way to proceed.

8.45 pm

What is worse is the position of the voluntary associations in Newham, which are the responsibility of the LDDC. When the dockland joint committee operated, there was assistance to organisations in and adjacent to the area, such as the Mayfair youth club. When the LDDC came into being, that was restricted. Some of the grants made by the LDDC were reduced and the London borough of Newham picked up the tab.

Despite the injunctions of the Select Committee report, there were reports that an outside organisation was being interviewed and requested by the LDDC to organise voluntary activities in the area. It was said that about £200,000 would be available, which was the amount being provided by the LDDC to existing voluntary agencies in Newham. I wrote to the chief executive of the LDDC to find out what was happening because some of the voluntary agencies, under a well-arranged voluntary agencies council in Newham which has a docklands committee and has been in contact with the LDDC for many years, were distressed. I have not yet received substantive information from the LDDC.

I also wrote to the Minister. In his letter of 2 January he stated:

"There have been some recent meetings between LDDC, the London borough of Newham and Newham Voluntary Agencies Council. I gather that the results of these are that Newham are to write to the Corporation setting out their views for consideration by the Corporation's Executive Board when the project application is discussed. If the project is approved, LDDC intend to seek the views of the Newham Voluntary Agencies Council on each scheme that Inter-Action put forward as part of their consultancy."

Consultancies have a place in life, whether in civil engineering, housing or publicity. There is certainly plenty of consultancy in publicity. In a written answer on 3 July 1984, the Minister told me that the LDDC provision for publicity provision was £1,857,000.

Consultants for local voluntary organisations are a different issue. Some may argue that the matter has not yet been agreed and that, if it is agreed, individual projects will be submitted. Today I received a folder entitled:

"The Inter-Action Community Calendar 1985. London Docklands Young People Look At A Computer Future."

Attached to it was a paper called:

"Inter-Action Trust, Royal Victoria Dock, London."

It is complete with telephone number, and is divided into headings including, "Resources", "Training and Consultancy: General"., "Computers: Training and Consultancy".

Many other things are going on, with which local organisations already deal. It appears that projects are already in train. They are apparently unknown to the Minister because he said that, if consultancy was agreed and if projects went forward, they might be put in train. If that is so, why has that folder been printed and distributed in my constituency? The matter is out of control.

The leader of Newham council is criticised for being involved in the LDDC. The concept is not without controversy, but what does he do? It puts him and the Minister in a difficult position. The voluntary agencies council has not been consulted on the way in which money for voluntary activities should be distributed in the area.

Are the exhortations of the Select Committee being followed? I suggest not. The objectives that it set may be followed in some respects, but bearing in mind the enormous resources available, the LDDC has not behaved in a way deserving of the trust and co-operation of the local people.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) drew attention to the anomaly that spatchcocked into a Bill nearly all of which is about new town corporations there is a clause dealing with urban development corporations. That anomaly shows clearly the muddled thinking about urban development corporations that has been characteristic of the Government's attitude towards them since they were proposed. The Government have never been able to draw a distinction between setting up a new organisation with wide powers in a green field, where there is no population whose wishes must be taken into account, or enlarging small villages such as Milton Keynes and bringing in a new population, and setting up a development corporation with enormous powers in an area that is already densely populated. Many people live there cheek by jowl, some of them in rundown housing. They have many problems and strong views on what should be done about their problems, but they have discovered that they are being ruled by a body that is not in the least accountable to them.

The great change in the lives of the people who live in the area covered by the LDDC is that, in the past, if they did not like what the people who ran their area were doing, every few years they had a chance to chuck them out and to bring in some new people. They have now been deprived of that right. The body that governs them can ignore their wishes, and does, can evade all responsibility to consult them, and does, can treat them almost with contempt, and does, and they have no sanction. They can do nothing about it.

More than 50,000 people live in the area covered by the LDDC. When the development corporation was set up, 25,000 people were living on the narrow strip of land from Tower bridge to the Blackwall tunnel, including the Isle of Dogs. They had many problems, because it is a rundown, poor area. Unemployment there is as high as it is in the worst areas of Scotland, the north of England and Wales, and is almost as high as it is in Northern Ireland. Many of the inhabitants live in council flats which were built more than half a century ago, and which are, therefore, rundown. Many others live in private properties which were built a century ago and which are also rundown.

The development corporation is supposed to enrich the lives of those people, but it does nothing of the sort. The two things that are vital, not merely to enrich their lives but to provide a decent standard of living, are the provision of homes and the provision of jobs. I need add little to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said about the provision of homes. Such homes as are being provided are being sold to people who come from outside the borough—people who are not included in the 25,000.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the cost of the houses and flats being built in the area. He quoted from the corporation's report of about six months ago. I shall update his facts. I have a cutting from the local newspaper, the *East London Advertiser*, of 5 January 1985, from which I shall read a short passage:

"In . . . Tower Hamlets, docklands, property prices are comfortably into six figures, with top-of-the-range riverside penthouses commanding a heady £350,000."

That sounds good to my constituents who live in rundown Shadwell gardens, either unemployed or working for relatively low wages.

The article continues:

"Four-bedroom houses in St. Katharine's Dock costing up to £125,000 look modest compared with properties along Wapping High Street. Three-bedroom flats on St. John and King Henry's Wharves cost £295,000 and penthouses on Gun Wharf a sky-high £350,000."

I draw attention to the next paragraph, which includes a fresh point which I shall develop because I believe that the Minister should take it into account. It states:

"Gun Wharf is the first property in a wall of private homes built in Wapping, a wall cutting off the local community from the river."

We have here a riparian community which, for as long as I can remember—I have known the area for more than 60 years—has been denied access to the river. That stretch of the north bank has always been used commercially much more than the south bank. They were cut off by docks and, where there were no docks, they were cut off by wharves. There was little access to the river, and the little that was provided was very much welcomed and very much used.

9 pm

When the docks went downstream and those wharves shut down, there were to be fresh developments, and a corporation was set up to make life rich for the people of the area. One expected that the first piece of enrichment would be that they had access to the river, but they are denied access to the river by what this newspaper rightly calls a "wall" of private housing giving access to the river only to the privileged people who have £200,000 to spend on a riverside property, and cutting off all those 25,000 inhabitants from their access to the river.

In our last debate I was able to refer only briefly to the Shadwell basin development. I was in the time-limited part of the debate, unfortunately. Perhaps I might be forgiven for mentioning it again, because another wall that is being built, in addition to the wall round Gun wharf, is the wall round Shadwell basin.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) spoke with feeling, because he was personally involved in the project, of the desirability of river sports and access to the river for young people. The Shadwell basin project is tremendously exciting, and 2,000 people are taking part in it. To give due credit, Shadwell basin was developed with the help of the docklands development corporation and others, including the borough council, as a water sports area, and 2,000 people use it. It is by far the biggest water recreational exercise and training area in London. People sail there, they canoe, they windsurf and so on.

Now the corporation has proposed a project, which has been fiercely rejected locally, to build high-rise flats—some four storeys high and some five storeys high—round the edge of this project, not only to cut off access to the basin, but to cut off the wind. It stops more than 50 per cent. of the wind getting into the basin, so there will be little sailing and no windsurfing. This terrific project, which is of so much value, giving so much exercise, pleasure and training to 2,000 people, will be destroyed if this vandalistic corporation gets its way.

So much for homes, but what about jobs? The corporation makes great claims about the employment that it has created. I have my criticisms of the corporation, but it is terribly good at one activity. I have never found any institution in my long life so good at pinning medals on its own chest. If the members of the corporation were half as good as they think they are, they would not need to

[Mr. Ian Mikardo]

spend nearly £2 million a year on public relations and consultancies. Good wine needs no bush. A man who pins medals on his own chest generally does it because his valuation of himself is a good deal greater than other people's valuation of him.

The claims that the corporation makes of providing employment put in everything but the kitchen sink, and then put in the kitchen sink. The corporation counts in all the jobs in enterprises whose introduction into the area was created by its predecessors, the London Joint Docklands Committee and the council of the London borough of Tower Hamlets. It adds in the employment in the *Daily Telegraph* in Billingsgate and in *News International*, but the docklands development corporation did not bring those into docklands. They would be there now regardless of whether the docklands development corporation was set up, but the corporation still counts them and claims credit for them. It claims credit for all other relocations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South said, many of the jobs that it says it has created are relocated and not created at all.

A few weeks ago the Poplar jobcentre had a youth week. I pay tribute to the staff of that jobcentre. They did a splendid job in getting the local community, employers, schools and everybody else interested in the problems of employment for young people in the area. I talked to careers officers there. They said that the corporation was a dead loss and that nearly all the youth jobs were relocated.

I have received today a reply from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir George Young), about how many jobs were created and how many were relocated. He probably does not remember his answer at this moment. It is partial and out of date, but despite those two defects it still shows that relocation accounts for a great part of what the corporation claims as creation.

I said just now that if the corporation were half as good as it says it is it would not need to spend so much money saying so. If it were half as good as it says it is at job creation there would not be today, as there is, 30 per cent. unemployment on the Isle of Dogs, its main industrial area. The proof of the pudding is in the starvation in relation to jobs on the Isle of Dogs. That is the real test of the London Docklands development corporation.

The corporation's relations with the local people are appalling. It has the same idea of consultation as a Pittsburg iron master. It decides what it wants to do, then tells people that it is going to do it, and if they kick it is too bad because it can claim to have consulted them simply by virtue of having said something to them. The only consultation it ever does is ex post facto. It only ever discusses the shape of a die after it has been cast, and never before the casting process.

I beg the House to believe that it is no exaggeration to say, as I did a little while ago, that the corporation treats the 50,000 people in the area — including those in Newham and Bermondsey—with something approaching contempt. It gives a certain amount of largesse to social projects in the area, and that is welcome. I, for one, am glad of it, and so are many others, but it would be better if it consulted the people about what objects of largesse they would like to have, instead of deciding that in its cosy little offices. In any event, the giving of a bit of social largesse to the local population does not compensate for the corporation's failure to consult them and to take their wishes into account. It is like a father who spends no time with his children for 364 days of the year and gives them a present on Christmas day. That is not good fatherhood, and it is not good social behaviour for a public corporation whose decisions affect the lives and welfare of 50,000 people.

We have all too little power to call the corporation to account. We have little opportunity even of talking about it in this place. But, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said, if the amendment is carried the corporation will have to come along a bit sooner than it otherwise would to ask for some money, or the Minister will have to come along to ask for some money on its behalf. Then we can start asking questions about what is being done with the money, in a way that the local people cannot. We could even begin to fulfil our duties as Members of Parliament. Our rights and duties are severely limited by the great autonomy given to the corporation and by its unwillingness to impart information.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South described how he was treated in his search for information, not for his benefit—as he will not get anything out of it — but for the benefit of his constituents, and that showed just how the democratic rights of people, as expressed by their right to make and unmake this House, have been eroded by the corporation, its powers and the way in which it exercises them. I for one do not want glibly to give money whenever it is asked for. If the local authorities had been provided with the money given to the corporation, they would have done all that the corporation has done, and much more, without spending £2 million a year saying what good fellows they are. The corporation should give an account of itself and I am glad of this opportunity to demand some account from it.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): When the Under-Secretary of State replied to the Second Reading debate, he confirmed that one purpose of the clause that allowed the urban development corporations to have more money was to be able to hold this debate. He said:

"The fact that the limits are being increased is not a criticism but is to give the House a regular opportunity to debate the matter."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 231.]

I welcome and support all the comments that have already been made and now complete the quartet of Opposition Members who are all elected Members of Parliament and who represent between them all the area of the development corporation in London. I sincerely hope that our comments will at least elicit from the Minister tonight an acceptance of the fact that most of those who live in the areas that we represent and that are covered by the corporation are desperately concerned. The corporation set up by the 1980 Act does not have the confidence and trust of the people, and is not properly accountable either through Ministers to the House, or to the people for whose benefit it was set up.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) rightly quoted the words by which the corporations were given their mandate. They were given the most simple of mandates. In section 136, they were given as their object the securing of the regeneration of their areas. As the hon. Gentleman said, that was amplified with examples. One

of the duties imposed on them was to ensure that housing and social facilities were available to encourage people to live and work in the area. Surely the first obligation must be that those facilities encourage the people already there to live and work in the area.

It is no good encouraging people from outside if the communities already there are driven out. But the whole effect of the corporation's activities has been to bring in people and to ignore the people, communities, traditions, and employment and social characteristics of the areas covered. I am not saying that they have not learnt or that the individuals concerned are malicious or malevolent. I am not saying that the community officers are not trying to listen to, and to communicate the concerns and aspirations of, local people, but they are not achieving that communication.

I shall give some examples that worry our communities. I shall ask Ministers to think again about some of the matters that the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 allows them to think about or to pass on our concerns to those running the docklands corporation. Some of the points have been touched on. We have all been speaking specifically about the London Docklands development corporation because that is the one we are concerned about and about which we know most. The value of land on both sides of the Thames has escalated enormously. The LDDC has vested land which belonged to other public authorities; in every case it has been vested without the consent of those authorities. We accept that the value of such lands is established by the district valuer.

9.15 pm

I shall give the example of the Cherry Garden site by Cherry Garden pier, which is the subject of present discussion. In December, the LDDC chairman told me and other local community representatives that the corporation will insist that that land be sold at a price that will take into account the cost of sharing the river wall, adding in approximately £1·5 million to make the resale value over £2 million, although it was bought for less than £1 million. If the docklands are to be regenerated, expenditure on river banks and walls should not necessarily be passed on as part of the cost to anyone who wishes to develop housing, if it is in the public sector, by a housing association or by a voluntary agency. Yet that is what the corporation is insisting on as an on-sale cost.

Nothing in the Act requires that. Nothing in the Act defines what should be added to the land valuation. Nothing in the legislation passed by the House defines that. The Government should, informally — or, under their powers in the Act, formally—give directions to the LDDC that, if it is to meet the housing needs of the docklands communities, it should do so in a way that does not impose unjustified costs on them.

The problem is that the Government's attitude has always been that development should take place in the private sector because of statistics from the census. In my constituency, for example, council occupation was over 80 per cent. and owner-occupation was only 2·5 per cent. I do not know the statistics in the constituencies of my neighbours. The Government's attitude is illogical. It depends on what people need, want and can afford. The Under-Secretary quoted figures. A few hundred people who were council tenants in Southwark bought the first houses. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) quoted prices of £300,000. In my constituency, flats which command wonderful riverside views are going for over £225,000. That is the going price of the river view that used to be and should be, as it were, the heritage of those who worked on the river to make the city great. It means that, if the people want to buy under a shared ownership scheme, a form of co-operative occupancy, or housing association development, they cannot have it. There was one one-off scheme. The World of Property Housing Trust, as a special deal, built houses to transfer tenants from downtown estates, but as yet there is no commitment to more.

There is no way we can control the operation of this wretched corporation, because it is out of anybody's control. There are no criteria to define how it should work apart from the generalised provisions in the legislation. We urge the Government to ensure that it must first meet the housing needs of the communities. If the people want to stay and buy, that is fine, but it should be at prices they can afford. The corporation is examining ways of doing that more sensitively under its new chairman than under his precedessor. It is considering giving loans to local people. I hope that these will not have to be paid back, because they would act as a charge on the sale price of the house in the same way as happens on the break-up of a marriage. In reality, a person always has the house for as long as he wants it. If the price is £50,000, £60,000 or £70,000, a small loan will make no material difference. The 1980 Act allows the Government to intervene if they wish. The docklands corporation is also allowed to intervene. We urge that intervention.

There was a boom in the cheap, build-for-sale properties. Houses in the Surrey docks and on the north side of the river went like hot cakes, primarily to local people. However, the second phase of the development involved much more expensive property. The cheaper property was the taster, and now, in places such as Elephant lane in Bermondsey and in Rotherhithe, houses are much more expensive. The figures do not present the case accurately.

I urged my predecessor, the vice-chairman of the corporation and chairman of its housing committee, to do what he could to bring prices down, but I have to come here for action. People of all political parties in my constituency and elected Liberal representatives and those not of my political persuasion believe that the only way that we can make the docklands corporation meet the needs of the people — until we can amend its constitution so that it is more accountable — is to ask that, under section 136(5), the Secretary of State should

"contribute such sums as he with the Treasury's concurrence may determine towards expenditure incurred . . . by any local authority or statutory undertakers".

The housing authorities — Southwark council in my area and Newham and Tower Hamlets—have a statutory duty to house local people. The docklands corporation has the power, with the Secretary of State's consent, to use the £600 million which it can borrow to house local people. I refer in particular to young local people and to one of the two riverside estates. Over 1,000 young people have applied for single bedroom accommodation and are on the waiting list of one of the districts concerned.

I urge the Government to think seriously about whether, since they have always smiled benignly on development corporations, money can be set aside to provide local housing at a cost that people can afford.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

I ask the Minister to invoke two other provisions in the 1980 Act. The Secretary of State can require the development corporation to exercise powers to ensure that its primary duty is to retain employment and to facilitate the housing of existing communities. I also ask the Secretary of State to take another step which has not yet been taken. We have asked the LDDC to provide housing for local people. It argues that it is not a housing authority. It says that it can spend money on environmental improvements but not on an estate such as the Swan road estate.

Hon. Members may have visited the Mayflower pub, near the site from which the pilgrim fathers' ship went to America. That site cannot be refurbished with money from the LDDC because the LDDC is not a housing authority. The most that it can do is renovate the outside. That is no consolation to people with flats which need to be repaired inside. A building which looks beautiful across the river is no consolation to the resident of a substandard property. I ask the Minister at least to undertake that he will consider, with his colleagues, invoking the powers in that Act to allow the LDDC to become a housing authority.

One other aspect has been mentioned by colleagues from the dockland boroughs. The lack of accountability has some appalling implications. An architectural competition was held for the development of Cherry Garden pier site. The contract was awarded to the developers who came third in the competition, in which there was a joint second prize and no first prize. There is an enormous protest. The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar said that a wall is to be erected on his side of the river. Under the Cherry Garden development, we were to have seven seven-storey blocks of flats where there is now space and a view of and access to the river.

So far only one significant concession has been made, as a result of a request for recommendation by Lovell Farrow, the developers. Of course, the LDDC is its own development control authority. It asks itself for permission. If it is not happy, it can advise itself on how to ask for planning permission. Then permission is granted and the development goes ahead. The only concession is that there will be one fewer block of flats. There will be less crowding on the site. However, the nature of the development will be substantially the same. Not only is it dishonest to hold an architectural competition and give the contract to the winners of the third prize, but only the third prize winners have had a chance of submitting another planning application.

Assurances were given to elected members of the local community that no further steps would be taken until there was further consultation, but we have discovered that an application for another site has been submitted and planning permission has meanwhile been given. That has happened despite a request by me and others that we be given notice of planning applications. I made that specific request and received a letter saying that I would get notice of planning applications, but I have heard no more. The hon. Member for Newham, South and the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and, I have no doubt, the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar have the same problems. We are not being told what is going on. If elected representatives, whether borough councillors, Greater London councillors or hon. Members, are not being told, what accountability is there?

The situation is highly unsatisfactory. The intention to regenerate those communities is not being fulfilled. Jobs are not being created — the new jobs are mainly relocated jobs. The net result so far, some three years into the development corporation's life, is that it has not stemmed in any way the drift away from central London of families and communities. In my constituency, 20 per cent. of those people moved out of inner London in the 10 years before the LDDC was set up. That trend has not changed. People still are not able to stay; their needs are not being met and communities are being broken up. If what the *Financial Times* called the greatest piece of real estate left in Europe cannot have a better destiny with more imagination and humanity than that, it is a sad lot and a sad day.

It is not yet too late, but it will soon be too late. The speculator and the investor will have moved in and the jobs and the people will have gone. The old communities will not be regenerated. In part, there may be a different community, but the form of change is not something that any accountable and democratic group of people can permit without severe protest. Whatever good intentions the Government may have had, the expectations have not been fulfilled. They must sit down with the LDDC and all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate and think about the strategy. I say, I believe on behalf of all of us, that we would be happy to enter into a regular and more accountable dialogue to make sure that the people whom we represent in the part of London whose heritage we fight for get a good deal and not the poor and ever-worsening deal that they have got over the past few years.

9.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): The amendment, moved rather unusually from the Back Benches by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), has provided a useful opportunity for a wide-ranging debate about the LDDC, although the clause also relates to the Merseyside development corporation. I cannot help noting a paradox in that the bulk of the Bill is about new towns, and there the thrust of the Opposition's criticism is that we are winding up too quickly those publicly created bodies accountable to Ministers. They say that we should have more new towns and allow the existing ones to continue for even longer.

When we come to the UDCs, which are, in effect, new town corporations in the inner cities, the criticism is the reverse—we should not have set up those bodies and we should not continue their operations. Opposition Members have an inconsistent approach to those two matters.

The second paradox is that we are always being asked by Opposition Members to spend more public money; to invest in the infrastructure, and to do something about the inner cities. Clause 12 does that. We are increasing the financial limit available to the urban development corporations. To have listened for the past one and a half hours to the debate, which has been unmitigated criticism of the Government, one would not think that that is what the LDDC is doing. It is investing in the infrastructure of a decaying part of the city; it is reversing decades of decline; it is creating jobs and homes; and it is succeeding where the local authorities' conventional structure has completely failed.

Despite what Opposition Members have said, we do not intend to arrest or reverse the excellent progress that has

been made by the LDDC. They say that they speak on behalf of their electors, and I am sure that they do, but the former Member for Bermondsey, Mr. Bob Mellish, takes a view that is diametrically opposed to that of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) when it comes to the way that we should tackle the problem in docklands. It is not for me to adjudicate upon which of them speaks the truth. It shows that there is an element of doubt as to whether the view put forward by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is the only view.

I have spent a great deal of time in docklands and have talked to the people who live and work there. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said that there was a strong feeling of resentment there. That view is changing. If one talks to the people in the boroughs involved, one finds that their initial view of complete hostility is now being tempered as they see what is happening. They are shopping at the Asda store that has been built at the Isle of Dogs. Some of them have jobs in the firms that have been set up. I detect a shift in public opinion in the boroughs involved as a result of the excellent progress that has been made by the LDDC.

I shall pick up some of the points that have been made. I take seriously some of the criticisms. First, there was one about housing made by the right hon. Gentleman, which was picked up by his hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo), that the new housing was not available to those who live in the area. At Nelson's reach five phases of new housing have been released for sale since July 1983. Each time people have queued overnight. More than 90 per cent. of the 118 homes have been sold to or reserved by local people, and at Mayflower court, a competition-winning scheme by the riverside, the pressure was so great that the developers decided to release the whole scheme within days. Of the 76 homes, I understand that 18 have been reserved by council tenants. The picture is not as dramatically one-sided as was put forward by the two speakers.

If one studies the structure of housing in Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham, one sees that there is a dramatic imbalance. It is far too heavily weighted against owner-occupation. There is a preponderance of publicly owned stock there. In 1981, only 5·3 per cent. of the houses in docklands were in owner-occupation. The figure is now 12 per cent., and the target is 30 per cent. That represents a shift in the right direction. It would be wrong for there to be further investment in public sector stock in that area. We are moving towards a much fairer balance which will encourage people to live and work in the area.

On unemployment there was a debate as to whether the jobs created in the area—some 4,129—were new jobs or relocated jobs. The economy in London is very mobile. Docklands has not been getting any jobs—either new or relocated ones. As a result of the enterprise zone firms are setting up in the Isle of Dogs, where they were not setting up before. I should have thought that that ought to be welcomed by those who represent the area.

As for Inter-Action, I shall write to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). The LDDC has contacted my Department for a decision, but a decision has not yet been made. I shall write to the hon. Member about the advertisement that he mentioned.

As for voluntary organisations, again one would not have thought, from listening to the debate, that the LDDC actually spends £750,000 each year on these organisations and that the Government have recently increased the maximum that it can spend. I have a long list of organisations in Newham which receive funding from the LDDC. For example, the Beckton park residents' association receives £1,500 and the docklands canal boat trust receives £5,000. So it is not the case that the LDDC is not doing what it can to help voluntary movements in the area.

Mr. Spearing: I think the Minister will agree that I did not say that it is not doing so. I said that the LDDC is not taking account of certain matters. In order to put the record straight, I do not believe that I quoted an advertisement in respect of Inter-Action. It was in relation to the boat show. The quotation related to a programme sheet which purported to show that Inter-Action is already committed to programmes in the docklands area. No permission has yet been given and no moneys have yet been voted.

Sir George Young: I believe that that is the correct understanding. The corporation has submitted a project application to my Department, but we have not yet taken a decision on it.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney asked me about the STOLport. As I believe he knows, the reopening of the inquiry is a matter for litigation, but the Government will take whatever steps are necessary in the light of court proceedings.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to houses in Wapping about which he has spoken in the House on previous occasions. The corporation is pledged to ensuring that a substantial proportion of the housing schemes on its land is within the means of people earning average London incomes. On the other hand, the corporation has to ensure that it does not set house prices so artificially low that those who buy them can make a windfall profit by selling them on at their true market price. The corporation has introduced shared ownership schemes in order to bring housing within the reach of people on average incomes, but at the same time has tried to ensure that they do not sell them at artificially low prices.

Mr. John Fraser: What will be the final proportion of houses to let in shared ownership schemes on the one hand and houses for sale — figures amounting to up to £330,000—on the other?

Sir George Young: As I said a few moments ago, the objective of the LDDC is to ensure that roughly 30 per cent. of the homes in docklands are owner-occupied, as against about 5 per cent. when it started. Even 30 per cent. would be under half what it is for the country as a whole. Therefore, I cannot accept the criticism that it will move to a position where owner-occupation is at too high level. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney welcomed the light transit railway system. I wonder whether we should have had that system had it not been for the LDDC. I wonder whether Tower Hamlets, for example, and the other boroughs through which it runs would have found the money to go ahead with the railway. The GLC had the resources, had it so wished, to go ahead with the light transit railway system but it did not do so. The LDDC is putting up half the money for that system. London Regional Transport is finding the other half. I wonder whether that scheme would have gone ahead had it not been for the establishment of a single-minded

[Sir George Young]

development corporation such as the LDDC with a commitment to the area, which has taken the decision to go ahead.

Mr. Mikardo: May I make two points to show that what the Minister is saying is nonsense. First, the main initiative came not from the London Docklands development corporation but from London Transport. Secondly, the proposal was put forward by the docklands joint committee before the LDDC was formed. If it had had the money that the LDDC has received it would have done the job.

Sir George Young: The argument for a body such as the GLC is that it can take strategic decisions on projects that would take a relatively small proportion of its budget. The GLC did not do that; half the money came from London Transport and half from the LDDC. My view is that we would not have got the project without a body such as the LDDC.

Mr. Mikardo: That is not my view.

Sir George Young: We shall have to agree to disagree.

Much of the argument has been about accountability and answerability. The criticisms of Labour Members have been the same as those that I hear from my hon. Friends about the new towns—that they are appointed by Ministers, that they do not have to answer questions, and so on. If one sets up organisations such as the LDDC or the new towns, it is inevitable that there will not be the same accountability as there is with a local authority. Against that, the local authorities could not have coped with the new towns development and did not and could not have coped with the problems in docklands. One has to accept the downside — less accountability and answerability—for the upside, which is the progress that has been made in docklands and the revitalisation of the area.

Hon. Members did not speak to the amendment, which would reduce to £550 million the financial limit at which a further debate in the House would be necessary. The arrangements in the Bill are in line with previous arrangements for the new towns and the LDDC. It is reasonable to calculate the limits so that such debates occur, on average, every two or three years.

The limits were originally set in 1980 and we have had one debate on the order to increase the limit. We are now debating the primary legislation, which will increase the limit and renew the power to increase the limit. That will give rise, on present plans, to another debate in about three years. That is reasonable and I see no reason to advise the House to accept the amendment.

If I have not answered matters raised in the debate, I shall write to the hon. Members concerned.

Amendment negatived.

9.42 pm

Mr. Gow: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill provides for the completion of the winding up of the new towns programme in England and Wales. It changes the purposes for which the Commission for the New Towns exists. While retaining its task of making the best use of the property transferred to it, the commission is given the new primary function of disposing of that property as soon as it considers it expedient to do so. The Bill also provides for the winding up of the commission when its purposes have been substantially achieved.

Some features of the Bill contain nothing novel. The Labour Government wound up new town development corporations when their tasks were done. They set target dates for the winding up of others, and some of the dates set by the Labour Government when they were in power were earlier than those to which we are working.

Since 1979, we have continued the task of bringing the new towns to completion. Four development corporations —for Harlow, Stevenage, Corby and Bracknell—have been wound up and, as the House knows, five more—for Northampton, Redditch, Skelmersdale, Basildon and Central Lancashire—are planned to be wound up this year. I will announce shortly a final decision about the north-east new towns, two of whose distinguished representatives are present on the Opposition Benches.

The Bill enables us to build on what has been achieved and to take the process through to completion. The Commission for the New Towns has done, and is doing, an outstanding job, both in its general task of disengagement and, as we have seen at Corby, in its role of promoting a town that faced special difficulties. I wish to pay special tribute to the work of the chairman of the commission, Sir Neil Shields.

The Bill gives the commission a remit for completing all its tasks, both in the towns that it currently manages and in those where it has yet to assume responsibility. It also puts the remaining development corporations on a sound financial footing. There will be no forced sales of assets, nor any sales contrary to the best professional advice. The decision made by the Under-Secretary in the case of Redditch is proof positive of that. Our aim is an orderly and responsible disengagement at a pace consistent with the market, to the magic of which I again pay tribute.

Once the commission has completed its tasks, there is no reason why it should remain in existence, so the Bill provides for it to be wound up when that stage is reached. For the reasons that I have just given it would be wrong to put any fixed time limit on that event, but I can assure the House that we will progress as quickly as we can, with responsibility, towards that goal.

The Bill also allows the two UDCs to press on with their task of revitalising their areas after years of delay and neglect. The neglect that there had been in the areas where the two development corporations are now in operation is a massive condemnation of years of Socialism in those areas. The Government are building on the well-tried approach of a development corporation. Our approach is sensible, practical and consistent—precisely what one might expect from Her Majesty's present Ministers. The two UDCs have already made substantial progress in tackling the problems, in co-operation with the private sector. The Bill enables further progress to be made.

The Bill provides a sound basis for the completion of the new town programme and the further important work of the development corporation, and—at the earliest sensible moment—the dissolution of the commission. I commend this enlightened Bill to the House.

9.48 pm

Mr. Harry Cowans (Tyne Bridge): I do not think that I have heard a more modest speech in all my years in the

House. In reality, the Minister is in danger of becoming black and blue all over from throwing bouquets at himself. I seem to have heard the phrase

"the magic of the market"

about a hundred times. It is indeed a magic market place that cannot find work for 4 million people. The word "magic" can just mean a trick. Sometimes the trick requires help. A volunteer joins the magician on stage and the magician makes one of his possessions—not one of the magician's—disappear. That picture sums up the meaning of the phrase

"the magic of the market".

I am a super-optimist. I had hoped that in Committee we would make some progress and bring about some alterations to the Bill, but it was apparent from the beginning that there were substantial differences between the two sides, and that is even more apparent now. I have heard nothing tonight to change my opinion. I agree with the Minister that when the new towns were set up the intention was that they would be wound up when they had completed their tasks. However, one of the fundamental distinctions between the Government and the Opposition is over the stage at which the new towns can be considered to have completed their task.

I want to tell the Minister about a situation of which I have just been informed. Had I known about it when the Bill was in Committee, I should have told him about it then.

I apologise to whoever is the hon. Member responsible for Hemel Hempstead. I understand that the hon. Member is a Conservative. Hemel Hempstead used to be a constituency in its own right. I have tried to find out where it is now and whose constituency it is in, and I have singularly failed. I apologise to the hon. Member concerned. Had I been able to establish who represents Hemel Hempstead, I should have informed the hon. Member that I intended to refer to it.

I return to the business of having completed a task. I quote:

"When the Hemel Hempstead new town was planned, a brand new hospital was promised and 24 acres of land purchased by the Development Corporation to pass to the Health Authorities when they were ready to build."

Hemel Hempstead new town was taken into the commission in 1962. Presumably it was thought that the new organisation would continue what the new town had started. Part of the hospital was completed, but now money to complete the hospital and to buy the land on which to build it is not available because the Department of the Environment insists on the full current commercial price. I suggest that the new town had not completed its task, because the hospital had not been completed. If the new town had not been wound up, the problem would not have arisen. That is just one example.

Labour Members of the Committee can congratulate themselves on their religiously latching on to the argument about new towns' close co-operation with local authorities. We argued the case of the company town. I am grateful to Councillor Walter Stranz of Redditch, who has written about the proposed sale of assets by Redditch development corporation. He said that

"the best start to the New Year we could have had"

was the news that it would not become a company town.

I pay credit to the Minister. My problem is that he is administering just what Labour members of the Committee advocated. The only difference between us is that we want such action to be written into the Bill. The Minister would not allow that. With regard to Redditch, he has, for the time being, stopped it from falling into the trap of becoming a company town. However, I have one or two quarrels with the Minister. It is not too late to put these matters right.

An article of 28 December said:

"The Minister, who is responsible for new towns, said the bids had been carefully examined but it was felt that they were not acceptable."

That is our point. Nobody tells us why they are not acceptable. We cannot challenge the Minister on the Floor of the House. We wanted such provision written into the Bill but did not get it, and yet the Minister is doing exactly what we want. I applaud that, but the sting is in the tail. Mr. Norman More, the director of Redditch development corporation, has said that he is not happy with the Minister's views and will be back in the new year, presumably to try to change his views. That, too, will not come before the House.

There would have been no problem if what we had asked had been written into the Bill. If the Minister is doing what we ask, there can be no harm in writing such actions into the Bill. It is not too late. The Minister obviously believes that this is the right approach, so why will he not write such action into the Bill? He might not be here next time. Someone quite different might adopt a completely different attitude.

It is not too late to do this in order to safeguard the situation—[*Interruption.*] If at this stage the Minister wants to say that he will do it in another place, I shall be delighted to give way to him. There seems to be some frivolity about this, but if that leads to an amendment in another place, I shall laugh with everyone else. However, there is no forward movement to the Dispatch Box to suggest that it was anything other than frivolity. It is not frivolous for those outside this House.

Another fundamental difference in Committee related to the powers in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) referred to this in the context of urban development and said that it was muddled thinking. I have news for him—it is all muddled thinking. There are many double standards.

The Minister has rightly written into the Bill provisions to prevent the Commission for the New Towns from doing certain things, but he has inserted another clause which allows him to do so under special powers. That is a nonsense in any terms.

We warned about the number of occasions when the powers of the House and of Members of Parliament are taken away and left purely in the hands of the Secretary of State. I again warn that such powers are available to any Secretary of State, not just to the present holder of that position. Again, it is not too late to alter this provision. It means that the Secretary of State will become the sole arbitrator of practically everything in the Bill. Whether or not the new towns have completed their task, he will become the sole judge, jury and executioner.

The Minister mentioned in passing the position of Washington, Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee. He did it so quickly that one of my hon. Friends dashed to the Opposition Front Bench to check whether he had mentioned it. I assured him that the Minister said "north-east", after which his remarks became clouded. We are, however, grateful for the fact that these new towns still exist. They are vital, and even this Government are beginning to realise that, but it must be apparent to the

[Mr. Harry Cowans]

Minister that without some decision on their future, all those who live and work in those areas must do so from day to day.

On a number of occasions my hon. Friends the Members for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), for Easington (Mr. Dormand) and for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) have received promises that some kind of decision would be forthcoming, but the Government have not said in which year that promise would be kept. If the Secretary of State were now to say that these new towns will continue for the next 10 years we would be grateful, but some decision is necessary, and he should realise that the continuation of these new towns is vital to the areas affected. So far we have had promises, and it would be nice if we had a final—we hope, positive—decision.

Both in Committee and on Second Reading great concern was registered about the job creation functions of the new towns. They are vital. Although the Minister may think that a new town has fulfilled its function, for example, towards housing and building, there are classical cases where he could not take that view about its present job creation function. That is particularly relevant to Washington, Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee. Obviously other new towns will be in the same position.

In Committee the Minister kindly provided me with a letter which he had promised me. He honoured that promise.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill and the Mineral Workings Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Cowans: That gave me quite a shock. I forgot that it was 10 o'clock. In his letter, the Minister said of job creation functions:

"There is no reason why a completed new town should be treated differently to other towns."

With the greatest respect, that was the very reason for setting up the development corporations in the first place. The fact that they were given job creation functions flies in the face of what the Minister said. A town may be completed in a physical sense, but the work of the development corporation on economic matters may be far from finished, especially in the areas that I have mentioned.

It is easy to consider such matters in isolation, but we cannot do that for this legislation. The job creation function is vital because unemployment is a black spot. We must remember that when considering the large amount of finance that has been taken from those areas under the Government's regional aid policy. The budget of one of the development corporations for job creation in my area is about £7 million this year. If one assumes that the other two budgets are approximately the same, we are considering a figure of about £20 million, which is coming from areas such as Washington, Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee. That could have disastrous effects. I hope that the Minister will bear those facts and figures in mind when he comes to make a decision.

The Bill is ill-conceived, it places far too many decisions solely in the hands of the Secretary of State, and it moves undemocratic bodies, such as development corporations, even further from the people, because, when they are wound up, people must go to the commission, which is miles from them. I plead with the Government, even at this late stage, to take the legislation back to the drawing board, make a serious and considered re-examination of it and return with more realistic legislation which takes less power from Members of Parliament and takes account of the existence of areas of high unemployment, although other parts of new towns are completed.

Even now I hope that if the legislation goes to another place it will be altered to be more reasonable and more constructive. I could not support it on Second Reading, and nothing that I have heard or seen since has changed my mind.

10.4 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): In May 1984, the Department of the Environment issued a discussion document entitled, "Review of the Target Wind-Up Dates for New Towns Development Corporations in the North-East of England." As part of the consultation process, the Government asked local authorities to consider whether the English Industrial Estates Corporation should take over the job promotion element of the new town development corporations.

I shall use as my example Washington new town. My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) will deal with Peterlee. Washington development corporation has been established for more than 20 years. During that time, the industrial promotion element has been vital to the people of the north-east, but no more vital than it is at present, when we are suffering high unemployment and a rapid loss of jobs, especially in our basic industries. Washington new town is part of the borough of Sunderland, where about one in three males is unemployed. The most tragic illustration of the problem is that 2,675 school leavers are unemployed while only 29 jobs are on offer at the careers office. If we add the number of youngsters on youth training schemes who will soon be looking for permanent jobs, we can see the magnitude of the economic problems of the north-east.

We need a job-creating agency that is not only experienced but part of the area in which the economic crisis is occurring.

It is interesting to note that the Department of the Environment agreed to meet a delegation from each of the three north-eastern new towns. The delegation included representatives of the local authorities and the development corporations, and Members of Parliament. It represented three different locations, different political parties, and different interest groups. Yet the Ministers who were present, including the Secretary of State, must have been impressed by the logic of the case presented and by the fact that there was no dissension from the main argument that the job-promoting aspect of the new towns

must stay with the development corporations for at least another five years before the Government carry out another review.

To obtain such unity, all the representatives of the delegation must have been, and were, convinced that the retention of the development corporations would benefit not only the new towns but the entire region. Even the Department of the Environment paid tribute in its discussion document to the work of the corporations. Paragraph 11 states:

"The development corporations have achieved a considerable success at promoting industrial growth in their areas, even in adverse economic circumstances."

A powerful case was made in a leader in *The Times* on Christmas eve for the retention of the job-creating function of the new town corporations——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this relevant on Third Reading?

Mr. Speaker: It is a fairly wide debate on Third Reading, and I believe that it is relevent.

Mr. Boyes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Times stated:

"The corporations of the New Towns of the North East form a component of regional aid, seeking employment for and promoting Aycliffe, Washington and Peterlee."

We agree that the corporations are vital components in the life of the area.

May I briefly illustrate why I believe that the job-creating function of Washington corporation should continue? When it was established in 1964, there were about 6,000 jobs in the area covered by the new town. Nearly all those jobs have now disappeared, especially with the tragic closure of Cape Insulation just before Christmas. By September 1984, 20,000 new jobs had been generated in the town. These did not only come from the immediate area. Much has been said about the capture of Nissan for Washington, but I remind hon. Members that in Washington——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this really in order at this stage of the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady must not challenge my earlier ruling.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: This is a different point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady knows that in a Third Reading debate it is perfectly legitimate to debate what is in the Bill. I think that that is what the hon. Gentleman is doing.

Mr. Boyes: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker.

A number of factories have already come from other countries to Washington because their companies recognise the expertise of the workers, and much more perhaps than some other people in Britain they recognise that the north-east is a super place in which to live and work and provides a good environment in which to establish new factories. Philips has arrived from Einhoven, Danavox has come from Denmark, Littelfuse has come from Austin, Texas, Cooper Tools has come from Houston, Canadian General Electric has come from Quebec, NEK has come from Norway, Nike has come from Oregon, and Rayovac has come from Wisconsin in the United States.

Of the many new companies that have established factories in Washington, 325 have been attracted by the job-creating agency, the Washington development corporation. I am informed by the corporation that there are 166 current live inquiries. Given such an achievement amid the difficulties in the north-east, and with 166 live inquiries on the table at the moment, is this an appropriate time for the corporation to be wound up? Would not it be a tragedy if some of those 166 companies were lost because the delicate negotiations taking place broke down following an announcement that the corporation was to be wound up in a few months and another, totally different organisation — I do not criticise English Industrial Estates, but it is a different organisation—would have to start many of the delicate negotiations again?

I have appealed to the Minister a number of times to consider what the decision is doing to the staff. The staff working for the development corporations are loyal, hard-working people who cannot possibly know what is to happen to them. We have been continually told that the decision would be made in the near future. When we met in July it was expected that the decision would be made at least by October, and we always had a closing date of 31 December because that was when notices had to be given to the staff, with a closure date of 31 December 1985.

We have not yet had an announcement, and I can tell the Minister that morale amongst the staff of the new town development corporations is decreasing all the time. The absence of an announcement is having a catastrophic and depressing effect. The people there are working and existing on rumours. As might be expected at such a time, a number of rumours about the future are flying round the corporations, but no one will give an exact date on which an announcement will be made.

At present, a Standing Committee is considering a Bill proposing the abolition, among others, of the Tyne and Wear county council. I can assure the Minister that that council's employees are taking careful note of the way that the staff of the new town corporations are being treated.

I have two simple questions to put to the Minister. I should like to know what is causing the hold-up. I hope that it is not just a matter of saving a few pounds because one organisation is a bit cheaper than another. People's lives and jobs cannot be measured in those terms. It may be a few pounds cheaper to run English Industrial Estates compared with the development corporation, but the long-term effects must be considered.

The Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher), who is described in a Scottish Office press release as Scotland's industry Minister, said:

"It remains the Government's view that the new towns should continue to maintain their important contribution to industrial growth and increased employment opportunities and that none of the development corporations should be wound up before the end of the 1980s."

I am pleased that he said that about the development corporations in Scotland, but I wish that the Minister would make the same announcement about the development corporations in the north-east of England.

10.15 pm

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): I shall be brief indeed in dealing with three points which arise from the Bill. The Under-Secretary of State is probably aware that I have spoken in every debate on the new towns since I came into the House. Therefore, he knows my views well and I shall not repeat them.

[Mr. Jack Dormand]

My first point arises from a genuine desire for knowledge. What is to be done about possible direct payment to owner-occupiers in new towns—this is dealt with in the Bill — where faults have been found in properties after purchase and after what can be called a reasonable survey of the property? I mentioned that on Second Reading and the Minister has written to me with his usual thoroughness. He sent me a two-page letter but, in all fairness, I must tell him that I have been studying it for most of the day and I cannot understand it. That is untypical of the Minister.

I thought that I had better raise the matter again today. Perhaps the Minister will write me another two-page letter, or possibly even a three-page letter. I say that in all seriousness, because there are people in the new town in my constituency who feel sufficiently strongly to form an organisation. I am trying to help and advise those people. Frankly, I have not had a satisfactory answer. My hon. Friends raised the matter in Committee and the Minister for Housing and Construction did give a reply, but I must say, in all fairness and seriousness, that I was not satisfied with that. I was not a member of the Committee, as the Minister is aware.

There is a lot of feeling about that matter in the new towns, because many people are affected. Will the Government consider issuing a circular to local authorities spelling out clearly the position. If that is done, perhaps he will send me a copy.

Another important matter was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans). He referred to the possibility of land being retained or sold where it is intended to have a hospital. I have exactly that position in my constituency. I have been endeavouring for well over a decade to have a community hospital provided for Peterlee. Last week the Durham health authority issued its strategic plan for the decade 1985 to 1995, and I find that there is a possibility of that happening towards the end of the decade. My goodness, that is another 10 years. Therefore, we are talking about 20 or 25 years. However, that is not my main point.

I should like an assurance from Ministers tonight that there will be no pressure from the Government on Peterlee development corporation to dispose of the land which it has held, much to its credit, because it knows the overwhelming need for a hospital for the area, not just for the new town. I may be doing the Government an injustice, but I should like an assurance that there will be no pressure from them on Peterlee development corporation, or any other corporation, as a matter of principle, to dispose of land. That is a matter for local people and local authorities.

Finally, I underline everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) has just said. I have said it many times, but I shall say it again, because there is a new factor. There is an absolute need to retain the development corporations in the north-east —that includes the one in Peterlee—because of their work as job-finding agencies. The record speaks for itself. It is known, and I need not repeat it.

I have said that there is a new factor, and that is that there are 12,000 miners working in my constituency, and the Government are proposing to close pits. That will lead to the utter devastation of the mining communities about which Opposition Members and the NUM have been talking. In my constituency, the only other job-finding agency is the Peterlee development corporation.

It is foolish in the extreme—I have used stronger words before in the House — for the Government to consider, particularly now, abolishing the corporation on the last day of this year. The record has been proved over and over again and is a repetition of what is happening in Washington and Aycliffe. I know the staff of the development corporation well. They are dedicated people. Men and women in their 30s and 40s, and at a critical time in their careers, are wondering what on earth will happen to them.

We are talking about perhaps another five years. The unemployment problem in the north-east will not be solved in another five years, so we are making a very restrained and moderate appeal. About two months ago the Under-Secretary of State first promised me a decision. It is also on the record in *Hansard* that a second promise was made that a decision would be reached before the Christmas recess. As has been said, the Minister then rather rushed it, and I think that I have his assurance on that point. But the decision has been put back again. That puts us in something of a dilemma. As Ministers have taken so long, they are becoming wiser all the time. I put it to them that it is such an important matter that they should take another five years to consider it, and then perhaps we can have a decision.

In present circumstances—I have to put it bluntly, although I have been trying to be neutral—abolition would be pure doctrinaire Toryism. I know that the two Ministers involved are far too intelligent and sensible to do that.

10.22 pm

Sir George Young: The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Cowans) urged the Government at this late stage to think again. But, with respect, he produced no compelling new arguments to persuade the Government to alter their view. I should point out that the House gave the Bill a Second Reading with a majority of 135, and at that stage we made our views quite plain and said why we felt that it was the right Bill for the new towns. Nothing has happened to alter that perception.

However, I shall deal briefly with the point that has been raised about the new towns in the north-east. The hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) said that I promised to do something. Ministers give promises very reluctantly, and I see from *Hansard* that I said:

> "I hope to announce a decision before the House rises for the Christmas recess." — [*Official Report*, 20 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 234.]

I regret that it was not possible to fulfil that hope.

It has been alleged that our consultations last year were a formality to rubber stamp our views. On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Easington said that we had a doctrinaire approach. But I think that Opposition Members will agree that we have not been doctrinaire. Clearly, the decision is difficult, but we want to take it as soon as possible. However, it is worth waiting a little in order to get the right decision.

It is worth pointing out that the Labour Government proposed to wind up Washington development corporation on 31 December 1982. That puts into perspective some of the criticisms about our action in not renewing it from 1985. Nevertheless, I realise the impact on morale as well

as the good work that has been done. We are quite clear that a firm decision is required. We must either confirm the target date as 31 December 1985 or replace it with a later date which is not subject to review. The corporation and its staff have been hanging in the balance for long enough. We must not prolong that period. But proper consideration of the issues and the alternatives available has taken longer than any Ministers in the Department would wish. We shall issue a decision on the future of these towns as soon as we have reached the right conclusion. I give the House that assurance. In the meantime I can only ask hon. Members who have spoken to be patient and we shall come back to the House the moment we have some news.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Mineral Workings Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 5

FINANCE FOR FORESTRY

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 32, leave out from 'purposes)' to end of line 34 and insert—

'where the rate of the payments is one determined by the Commissioners after consultation with the British Steel Corporation and the Ironstone Royalty Owners' Association.'.

I have introduced this amendment, in acknowledgment of the representations made to me in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), that the Ironstone Royalty Owners' Association, as well as the British Steel Corporation, should have a statutory right to be consulted about the rate of the special afforestation grant, because the association represents the landowners to whom the grant will be paid. The association, as I made clear on Second Reading and in Committee, has already been given an informal undertaking that it will be involved in the consultation, and I am happy to seek to formalise its position by means of this amendment.

My hon. Friend also sought to have enshrined in the legislation a requirement that the rate of the special grant should be subject to an annual review. I warned him that this might present technical difficulties, and I am afraid they have proved insuperable. I hope my hon. Friend will be content to accept the assurance which I now give that, notwithstanding the absence of a statutory provision in the Bill, the rate at which the special afforestation grant is paid between 1 April 1985 and 31 March 1990 will be subject to an annual review.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 2

THE IRONSTONE DISTRICT

Mr. Macfarlane: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 10, line 33, at end insert—

'1974 c.7	Local Government Act 1974.	In Schedule 6, paragraph 9.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this amendment it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 3 and 4.

Mr. Macfarlane: These are technical amendments to tidy up the list of repeals in schedule 2.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 10, leave out lines 34 and 35.

No. 4, in page 10, line 38, at end insert—

'1981 c.65.	Trustee Savings Banks Act 1981	In Schedule 7, in paragraph 12 the reference to paragraph 1 of Schedule 5 to the Trustee Savings Banks Act 1976.'. — *[Mr. Macfarlane]*

Motion made and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 10th January, Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to European Community Fisheries Arrangements for 1985 with the substitution of One o'clock or three hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, for the provisions in paragraph (1)*(b)* of the Standing order.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

Maternity Units

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

10.27 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): The purpose of my debate is to raise the subject of the small peripheral maternity units in some of the smaller hospitals in Britain. Very often in our major debates on the Health Service in England and Wales the smaller unit, which often gives better value to the public than the larger, more impersonal unit, is overlooked. I am compelled to raise this matter with my hon. Friend because I am concerned about what is proposed for Market Harborough general hospital maternity unit, which has 11 beds.

The value of this unit is recognised not only by the more than 5,000 people who have signed a petition to save it but by Leicester area health authority, which in February 1984 produced an admirable document entitled

"Strategic Intentions 1984 to 1994".

In this the authority saw the need to keep until 1994 the 11 maternity beds in Market Harborough. The document was entitled, "For consultation". Naturally, this met with total local support. Therefore, it was with considerable dismay and surprise that I learnt that a further document had been produced by Leicester health authority in October 1984, this time called

"A Strategic Plan for the NHS in Leicestershire 1984-94"

and described as a "draft for consultation". The proposal is to reduce by almost half the maternity provision for Market Harborough—from 11 beds to six. Eleven beds provide a professional unit; six provide emergency treatment only.

The House might ask what happened between February and October to change the area health authority's proposals. Was it a sudden surge of public opinion expressing itself instinctively, to which the health authority reacted? As the representative of Market Harborough and the surrounding villages, I assure the House that that was not what happened. Between February and October last year one of the most remarkable expressions of public opinion that I have known took place. Out of about 15,000 persons in the general hospital's catchment area, over 5,000 signed the SOBBs petition — that is the petition to "Save Our Babies Beds". I was overwhelmed by letters protesting about the rundown of beds. Between March and October I received only one letter in favour of the rundown. It was from the community health council.

The Leicestershire community health council does an excellent job, but in this case it is out of touch. For example, it has recently conducted a mass canvas of local people about organ donors. The Minister is a pioneer in this respect. He may recall my modest endeavour when I introduced a Bill designed to secure the anonimity of organ donors.

As my hon. Friend knows, the supply of organs is insufficient. The community health council has an excellent public consultation scheme. Nearly 3,000 people have been approached to find out what they think of the organ donor scheme and how it can be improved. The results, which have been sent to the Minister's office, show that the majority do not want a change in the scheme.

I have told the secretary of the Leicestershire community health council, Brian Marshall, that I support

what he is doing to promote the availability of organs but that the council should conduct the same public relations exercise for the Market Harborough maternity unit.

The community health council is the only supporter of the area health authority's sudden change of view. Public opinion did not cause the sudden change by the health authority. What did change it? In 1982 I was concerned about possible threats to the future of that highly successful unit. I wrote to the excellent lady chairman of Leicestershire health authority in May 1982, and Mrs. Margaret Galsworthy replied on 24 May 1982 to the effect that the authority had no plans for any closure of maternity beds in Market Harborough hospital, so far as could be foreseen.

The House will be interested to know that in the Leicester area alone it is the intention to slash the peripheral general practitioner maternity bed provision from 94 beds at the moment to 37 in 1994, a reduction of over 60 per cent. The figures include a reduction from 11 to six in Market Harborough.

I am convinced that behind the change of heart by the Leicester health authority is pressure from Trent region to centralise births. It has declined to provide new replacement GP units in the Trent region and is apparently determined to extinguish the peripheral GP maternity units altogether. In a recent leaflet it gives that as the policy of what it called its regional medical committee and backs that up by saying that it means a lower mortality rate for babies. The House accepts that priority must be given to securing the lowest possible mortality rate of babies. It is a most important factor; in fact, it is the most important factor that can be taken into consideration.

Trent region goes on to say that in the region in 1970, for instance, there were 23 baby deaths per 1,000, and that that figure had been improved to 13 per 1,000 by 1980. However, the single staggering fact, to which I call the attention of the House tonight, is that in the Market Harborough maternity unit, where it is proposed to halve the number of beds, compared with the 13 mortalities per 1,000 nationally, and 6·1 mortalities per 1,000 in comparable units, the figure is 0·67 per 1,000 deliveries. That is a remarkable statistic. It shows that the mortality level in that excellent unit is 20 times lower than the national average, yet Trent says that the unit is too small, does not work and should be closed because it is not wanted.

In the past 10 years, the unit in Market Harborough, in co-operation with consultants, has provided facilities for no fewer than 2,972 patients, of which 1,650 were delivered. During that time only two infants have died in the ward. One of them, delivered in a consultant unit, died unexpectedly of severe cardiac abnormalities, and the other was stillborn — no foetal heart was audible on admission in labour. The perinatal mortality rate of 0·67 per 1,000 deliveries compares with an average of 6·1 per 1,000 in comparable units and 13·3 per 1,000 in all maternity units. Any major change in the facilities available will lead to a deterioration in that record.

My hon. Friend is a busy, well-respected and much-admired Minister, but he should make time to rush to Market Harborough to see what is there. He should come and admire the unit. He would find a part of the National Health Service that is universally loved, admired and respected. He, like me, believes in the NHS. We want to make it successful. In Market Harborough we have a small maternity unit which is an example of how we would all like the NHS to be.

We must remember that it is the mothers' opinions that count. It may be of interest to my hon. Friend to know that there is a practice at Bowden house, Market Harborough, conducted by eight doctors who work at the Market Harborough general hospital. In a recent letter they said to me that over 90 per cent. of their patients request delivery in Market Harborough hospital and that that is a conservative estimate. They said that:

"we would be unable to guarantee a bed should these cuts be made. We believe that a significant number of women would not accept delivery in Leicester, and this would result in an increase in the number of home confinements and of deliveries on the way to hospital, thereby increasing the demands on the Flying Squad and already over-stretched Ambulance Services."

My hon. Friend is aware that I have been writing to him regularly on this subject since August, and I have been approaching you, Mr. Speaker, regularly for an Adjournment debate. I have come out top of the ballot this year, for which I am grateful. That I did not introduce the debate earlier was not due to lack of interest or urgency. The matter is important to local people.

My hon. Friend wrote a courteous letter to me on 25 October. He said that

"should any closure proposals emerging from these current discussions be opposed by the CHC, these will come to the Secretary of State for final decision."

These proposals are flying in the face of public opinion, the wishes of the mothers and of expert medical opinion. The CHC is completely alone in supporting the proposals and I invite my hon. Friend to investigate the CHC's attitude, which makes it unique.

10.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I have listened with great care to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), who has been pursuing his constituents' interests in this matter with considerable assiduity over recent months. We have had a correspondence. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's views and no one could have represented the interests of his constituents more powerfully in advance of any plans for closure or partial closure.

I hope that my hon. Friend will accept an apology at the beginning of my speech. I cannot tonight answer a number of the interesting and detailed local points that he has raised, because my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and I have to play a quasi-judicial role from time to time in cases referred to us where closure has been suggested by a district health authority. I have to reserve my position and that of my right hon. and learned Friend in case that should happen with regard to the hospital that my hon. Friend has talked about. I hope that my hon. Friend appreciates that. I am grateful for the assent that he has just indicated.

That will not stop me from expressing my opinions on the important national points that my hon. Friend has mentioned, and trying to be as helpful as I can when referring to as many of his local points as I reasonably can, subject to the proviso that I have just given.

Should any proposal such as my hon. Friend and some 5,000 of his constituents fear come forward and be accepted by the district health authority, and should that decision be endorsed by the regional health authority, my

[Mr. John Patten]

door and that of my right hon. and learned Friend will be open for my hon. Friend to bring representatives of his constituents to see me or my right hon. and learned Friend at the earliest opportunity. I am happy to give my hon. Friend that pledge.

In the time available to me I should like to pick up at substantial length a number of the national points that arise from the remarks of my hon. Friend and then to deal, in slightly less time, with some of the Leicestershire points. Perinatal and neonatal mortality is a subject that has concerned the House over a substantial period. The Social Services Committee has reported on a number of occasions on the problems of perinatal and neonatal mortality, the safety of mothers and the consumer interest of mothers. The Committee first looked at length in the last Parliament at the factors which may be linked with comparatively high perinatal mortality rates and considered in particular the importance of the place of birth and the facilities available at the place of birth. The all-party view to which the Committee came after taking extensive evidence, not just from professional interests but from consumer groups, was that

"an increasing number"

of mothers should

"be delivered in large units; that selection of patients"

should

"be improved for smaller consultant units and isolated general practitioner units; and that home delivery"

should be

" phased out further".

Those were the conclusions of the Social Services Committee in its second report of 1979-80.

In its reply to that report the Government welcomed the importance that the Committee gave to an increase in the number of deliveries in large units. Clearly my hon. Friend feels that the Government are unfriendly towards small units and are in favour only of large units. That is not the case and I shall seek to illustrate why. By and large, it is the Government's view, and it remains their view, that women should be encouraged to have their babies in the larger and properly staffed consultant units of district general hospitals, which can offer the whole range of obstetric, paediatric and supporting services necessary to cope with any emergencies at the time when the life of the infant is most frail and when the life of the mother may be threatened.

This view was also shared by the maternity services advisory committee, whose second report—a fascinating report — on care during childbirth was published in January 1984. However, the committee recognised that in some localities geographic factors will require the availability of what it termed "isolated" maternity units and recommended that such units, where geographic factors were a powerful influence on the provision of health care, should be equipped to a standard to cope with any of the complications that might have to be dealt with on site.

In July 1984 the Social Services Committee published its follow-up report and again recommended that the

"DHSS should do more to encourage regions, in the light of evidence available to them, to rationalise their maternity services in order to promote better standards of care as well as economy".

Again the Government concurred with that view. However, while it is our overall view that the larger unit, with the acute medical care that is available there, is likely to be a factor promoting the health and welfare of mother and child, or of mother and children in the case of multiple births, it is not for the Government to make an absolute prescription for all places at all times in England.

In recent years there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of maternity beds provided in units on hospital sites — either in consultant or general practitioner units — but we must have an element of flexibility and planning. Therefore, I agree with some of the remarks made by my hon. Friend. Health authorities must strike a balance between the interests of rationalisation and centralisation in order to try to provide the most cost efficient forms of care while at the same time —which is the most important point—helping mothers and their children and, on the other hand, providing the services that are necessary for more isolated communities. They must pursue the objectives of further reducing perinatal mortality and handicap and improving the safety of their services. They must also keep under review—I am sure that the Trent region is enjoining health authorities to do this—how far policies of concentrating staff and resources in large general hospitals match the needs and wishes of mothers who use the services.

In some communities, social and geographic factors —distances, difficulties of travel, particularly in winter, and so on — strongly favour the retention of smaller maternity units for low-risk cases. It is not true that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health and I have always approved health authorities' proposals to close smaller maternity units. I can think of at least two cases in the past six months in which units were kept open after careful consideration by my right hon. and learned Friend.

If the best use is to be made of the facilities of both smaller and larger units, we need an agreed booking policy that takes into account the needs of mothers, the nature of local GP obstetric care and the availability of essential medical staff. We need an integrated booking system between the smaller and larger hospitals, so that mothers who need more acute care, as well as those who prefer to go to larger units, can go to those larger units, while mothers perhaps on their second, third or subsequent births can go into smaller units closer to home. The best decisions must be made about where mothers are to go to get the best care at the time of birth.

It is because of the care that most district hospitals and doctors devote to the system that it may appear that smaller hospitals are "safer" than larger hospitals. Perinatal mortality rates appear to be higher in large acute general hospitals. As the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) would say, it is something of a conundrum. The reason is that generally only the mothers least at risk are put into the smaller hospitals. Reports do not usually take into account instances where the mother or baby has had to be transferred to a larger hospital because complications have arisen.

Generally, only mothers whose medical history and the progress of whose pregnancies have suggested that complications are unlikely are booked into smaller units. That is a matter of clinical practice which goes some way to explaining the apparently surprising figures quoted by my hon. Friend.

Sir John Farr: I accept what my hon. Friend says, but it does not hide the fact that the Market Harborough unit is still 12 times better than the national average for comparable establishments.

Mr. Patten: I assure my hon. Friend that such matters will be considered carefully if a decision on the hospital comes to Ministers.

Although the emphasis in recent years has been on improving the safety of maternity services by centralising — and there has been a dramatic fall in perinatal mortality rates—we must always remember the welfare and interests of the mothers. I welcome the growing awareness among health professionals that the new technology and clinical procedures that have been introduced to make labour and delivery safer for mother and baby, primarily in the larger units, should not displace the traditional concept of a healthy natural birth and the fundamental human values implicit in childbirth.

It is now widely recognised that the onus is on those practising the most up-to-date techniques of ante-natal and obstetric care to ensure that such techniques are just as acceptable to mothers as the traditional practices that they replace. However, it is critically important to realise that large units can very often provide just as homely and caring an atmosphere as the smaller hospitals. Many mothers who have been cared for in large maternity units in large hospitals speak highly of the homely and intimate quality of the care that they received there. Certainly, by and large, bigger should mean safer, but bigger should certainly not, in terms of the care offered to mothers, mean more impersonal.

I was most interested to hear of the consultations in which my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough has engaged in Leicestershire. I was also grateful for the information that he gave me, in the margins, about the organ donor scheme. I agree that the health authority has published a document setting out its proposals for health care services until 1994. As my hon. Friend will be aware, any plans for closures or significant changes in use which are opposed by the local community health council must be referred to my Department for ministerial decision. However, Ministers may also call in decisions for scrutiny on their own account, even if they are not opposed by the local community health council. That has frequently happened in the past.

If at the end of the consultation process the matter is referred to the Department, we shall certainly approach with an open mind the complicated issue that my hon. Friend has raised and give full weight to the views expressed by all interested parties. I repeat my pledge that after—not before—decisions have been taken locally, my right hon. and learned Friend and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues further with my hon. Friend and with constituents, doctors, mothers and representatives of interest groups in his constituency.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 10 January 1985

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON TRANSPORT (TOWER HILL) BILL *[Lords]*
As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Political Situation

1. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his current policy towards the situation in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): We aim to create a stable, peaceful and prosperous society which accommodates fairly and generously the identities of both parts of the community.

Mr. Ross: Does the Secretary of State agree that the maintenance of good relations between Dublin and Westminster is paramount? Does he accept that parts of the Forum report are worth building on and should not be completely dismissed? Does he believe that a parliamentary tier to the Anglo-Irish Council would be helpful at this time?

Mr. Hurd: I agree that a good working relationship between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom is very much in the interests of Northern Ireland as well as of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The point about a parliamentary tier is essentially a matter for the Parliaments concerned and not one on which the Government should take an initiative.

Mr. Proctor: Will my right hon. Friend shy away from taking any new political or constitutional initiatives in Northern Ireland in the near future?

Mr. Hurd: I have tried to be steady and reasonable in what I have said about these matters, but I believe that there is an opportunity now, primarily for the elected leaders of the Province, to move away from arguing across the divide and finding ways in which they can hold practical discussions. If I can help that process forward with suggestions, I am ready to do so.

Security

2. **Mr. Molyneaux** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

7. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

13. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation.

Mr. Hurd: Since I last answered questions in the House on 29 November one soldier and five civilians have died in incidents arising from the security situation in the Province. The security forces continue energetically to combat terrorism. During 1984, a total of 528 people were charged with serious offences, including 41 with murder and 68 with attempted murder, and 197 weapons, 27,211 rounds of ammunition and 8,535 lb of explosives were recovered. I know that the House will join with me in paying tribute to the efforts of the security forces.

Mr. Molyneaux: What value can be attached to the Dublin Government's promises of co-operation when their Foreign Minister, Mr. Barry, consistently seeks to undermine and render ineffective measures taken by Her Majesty's Government to prevent terrorism? Does it not look as though Mr. Barry has assumed the role of protector of all people of Irish descent now living and working in England?

Mr. Hurd: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has read the same reports of Mr. Barry's remarks as I have. I have the impression that, under questioning, he measured his words with a good deal of care, and has been quite strongly criticised at home as a result.

Mr. Proctor: Is it not intolerable that the Irish Foreign Secretary should have interfered in measures taken in Liverpool and elsewhere to safeguard the lives of our citizens, and does this not put at risk, and is it not a contradiction of, the professed claims of Dublin to want to improve Anglo-Irish relations?

Mr. Hurd: Again I am in a difficulty. My information is that although Mr. Barry was pressed hard to comment in the sense that my hon. Friend describes, he refrained from doing so.

Sir John Farr: As the new Maghaberry prison, with more than 500 individual cells, will be opening later this year, and as the prison service in Northern Ireland is staffed at a rate of over three warders to one prisoner, will my right hon. Friend, in the ensuing months, consider the opportunity that is offered of abolishing the special category status there?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of the opening of the new prison. A number of related decisions have to be taken, and in considering what they should be I shall cover the point made by my hon. Friend. I have not yet taken any decisions, and some press accounts of this are therefore speculative at this stage.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to look at the extent to which funds are made available for the protection of off-duty members of the Ulster Defence Regiment in their homes, and will he ensure that the same amount of money is available for them as is available for members of the RUC and the RUC reserve?

Mr. Hurd: I am willing to look at this matter. The problem of protecting UDR part-time members when they

are at home is an important one which I have discussed with the hon. Gentleman more than once. We are doing everything that we can.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Does the Secretary of State agree that security in Northern Ireland is not helped if those who are charged with conspiracy after being arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act are not brought to trial quickly but are remanded indefinitely, or when the Act is used to arrest people for no other reason than that they are Irish and drunk? If one cannot be drunk on Christmas Eve in Liverpool, where can one be drunk?

Mr. Hurd: The administration of the Prevention of Terrorism Act on this side of the water is not my responsibility. I have been surprised at the speed with which people on both sides of the water have rushed in to comment on recent events before they know what has happened or what charges are being made. A little prudence from the hon. Gentleman would be advisable.

Rev Ian Paisley: Has there been any change in the Government's policy of granting personal protection weapons to those members of the UDR, the RUC and the police reserves who have finished their term of service, as there has been difficulty in individual cases, to which I have referred in letters? Will the right hon. Gentleman make a statement today on the bombing in Newry?

Mr. Hurd: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I have just had reports about the bombing in Newry, which has caused a great deal of damage in commercial premises, although no one has been seriously injured. However, I do not have the full details. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, there has been no change of policy, and he will understand that these are difficult decisions. I am sure that he will continue to draw specific examples to our attention.

Mr. Bell: On the question of security in Northern Ireland, and the consequential emergency provisions, does the Secretary of State recall the interesting and objective debate in the House on the Baker report? A number of recommendations were made during that debate and the Government showed their firm intention of acting on some of them. Does the Secretary of State intend to publish his proposals in a White Paper, and if so, will he append to the White Paper the various written submissions such as those made by the standing advisory commission on human rights in Belfast, he has received since the Baker report was published?

Mr. Hurd: We had a good debate just before Christmas on the Baker report. I am still digesting that debate and moving towards decisions on what changes in legislation we would recommend to the House. Let me include in that digestive process the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about a White Paper and its impact.

Gas Industry

3. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received about the future of the gas industry in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr Rhodes Boyson): Following the Government's announcement on 6 September 1984 that the Kinsale project would not be proceeded with, representations have been made by hon. Members of this House and also by some Northern Ireland politicians, local councils, employer and trade union groups in the gas industry, industrial and commercial concerns and members of the public.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister agree that his refusal to consider proceeding with the Kinsale gas project signs the death warrant not only for the Belfast gas industry but for 13 other areas, that over 1,200 jobs in Belfast alone, and others in many ancillary industries, will be lost, and that many thousands of homes will be affected? Has he considered the Coopers and Lybrand report of 21 December, which demonstrated the viability of a project to bring natural gas to the Greater Belfast area? Will not a course opposite to that suggested by Coopers and Lybrand cost at least £90 million in the Belfast area alone, with the closure of the gas industry?

Dr. Boyson: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the gas industry provides only between 2 and 3 per cent. of energy in the Province, and that the subsidy to it costs about £12 million. It costs £10,000 per man employed in that industry. What one spends on one part of the Northern Ireland block, one cannot spend on another. If, at any time, a viable scheme came before us, we would look at it. We have said simply, not that we will close the industry down, but that we shall not continue to give a subsidy. The Government have made their position clear on that point.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Is my hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members have felt that Northern Ireland has a right to be on the United Kingdom grid? What progress has been made with the exploitation of lignite near Lough Neagh and elsewhere?

Dr. Boyson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking those questions. About 15 per cent. of households in Great Britain are not receiving natural gas, because the gas industry is committed only to providing gas within 25 yd of a gas main and in reasonable quantities.

Mr. Skinner: Burn coal.

Dr. Boyson: The hon. Gentleman may be a greater expert on coal than on gas. There are people in Great Britain who are not actually plugged in.

We hope that before the end of this month about 200 tonnes of lignite will be burnt at the west Belfast power station. A decision on lignite's future will be influenced by that action. There is no doubt that there are massive reserves of lignite in the Province. There are about 400 million tonnes of lignite in Crumlin alone. Lignite is similarly to be exploited in five other areas in the Province. If we find that we can provide electricity economically by using lignite, the whole energy position of the Province will be transformed.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister encourage the liquid gas industry by including liquid gas in the fuels eligible for conversion grants and thereby fill the gap, which is growing?

Dr. Boyson: I know that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about this aspect. We shall certainly consider seriously the points involved. We shall by no means dismiss that idea and, if posible, we shall ensure that that is done.

Mr. Bell: As the Minister has read the report of the joint working group of the Northern Ireland gas employers board and gas trade union group, does he agree with its

conclusions that action will be required to save jobs in the gas industry and to remove threats to many more who may be indirectly affected, that a viable gas industry will benefit consumers, and that it will cost less to secure a future for gas in Northern Ireland than to close the present industry?

Dr. Boyson: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the future of a viable gas industry. The Government do not believe that there is a viable gas industry in the Province without heavy subsidisation. It is far better to grasp the nettle and to say immediately that we must find some other fuel which is more economic in the Province than to go on continually subsidising an industry that is slowly dying.

Planning Law

4. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he intends to make in planning law.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): In response to a recommendation of the Northern Ireland Assembly my right hon. Friend proposes to introduce legislation which would require applicants for planning permission to notify neighbours of their development proposals and would, in addition, make a number of miscellaneous amendments.

Mr. Forsythe: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the defects in the legislation which recently allowed an applicant from Doagh road, Ballyclare, effectively to bypass both the local council and the planning department and have his application approved by a planning appeals commissioner? What action does the hon. Gentleman intend to take to ensure that that does not happen again?

Mr. Scott: I know that my hon. Friend is giving careful consideration to the points raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe). I, too, am aware of the circumstances that have given rise to this concern. I am advised that, in the absence of a reason for a particular use, further enforcement action could be taken against a developer.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I acknowledge the improvement in enforcement procedure that was brought about by the previous Minister in the Department of the Environment, but will the Government bear in mind the undesirability of that procedure resulting in planning decisions being taken, in the first instance, by the planning commission?

Mr. Scott: I take note of the point raised by the right hon. Gentleman and will confer with my hon. Friend.

Postal Votes

5. **Mr. J. Enoch Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the votes cast by post in June 1983 in each of the constituencies of Northern Ireland were on grounds of *(a)* removal, *(b)* physical disability and *(c)* all other grounds.

Mr. Scott: As the answer is in the form of a tabular statement I shall, with permission Mr. Speaker, arrange for it to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Powell: Assuming that postal votes in respect of removal are only a very small proportion of the total, does the hon. Gentleman agree that in this context the scope for abuse is exceedingly limited?

Mr. Scott: Yes. I will clarify that figure. The average throughout Northern Ireland of postal votes for that purpose is about 3·6 per cent. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the undertaking given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Second Reading of the Representation of the People Bill. This is a matter that we shall wish to consider carefully in Committee.

The information in respect of postal votes cast in the June 1983 general election in Northern Ireland constituencies is as follows:

Constituency	*Total No. of postal ballot papers issued*	*Removals*		*Physical disability*		*All other grounds*	
		Number	*Percentage of total*	*Number*	*Percentage of total*	*Number*	*Percentage of total*
North Down	614	47	7·65	515	83·88	52	8·47
Strangford	555	46	8·28	421	75·86	88	15·86
South Down	3,068	109	3·55	2,673	87·13	286	9·32
Lagan Valley	905	54	5·97	766	84·64	85	9·39
Upper Bann	1,458	40	2·74	1,249	85·67	169	11·59
Newry and Armagh	3,145	86	2·73	2,539	80·73	520	16·54
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	7,345	136	1·85	6,290	85·64	919	12·51
Mid-Ulster	5,026	94	1·87	4,534	90·21	398	7·92
Foyle	3,279	162	4·94	2,933	89·45	184	5·61
East Londonderry	3,381	78	2·31	2,912	86·13	391	11·56
North Antrim	1,585	32	2·02	1,393	87·89	160	10·09
East Antrim	589	14	2·38	489	83·02	86	14·60
South Antrim	781	46	5·88	661	84·64	74	9·48
Belfast North	601	68	11·31	488	81·20	45	7·49
Belfast East	567	60	10·58	438	77·25	69	12·17
Belfast South	1,091	48	4·40	935	85·70	108	9·90
Belfast West	712	144	20·22	558	78·37	10	1·41
Total	34,702	1,264	3·64	29,794	85·86	3,644	10·50

Political Situation

6. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next plans to have discussions with the Government of the Republic of Ireland about the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: I look forward to continuing discussions with Ministers of the Government of the Irish Republic within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council. I would not normally expect to announce in advance the dates for such meetings.

Mr. Dubs: When the Secretary of State next meets his opposite number from the Republic of Ireland, will he be putting forward specific proposals about the future of Northern Ireland, or simply responding to suggestions from the Republic or from the political parties in the North?

Mr. Hurd: When the occasion arises I shall be guided by the phrase in the Chequers communiqué of November, which referred to the need for close and continuing dialogue between the two Governments on subjects related to Northern Ireland within the framework of the intergovernmental council. It is certainly not just a matter of sitting back and listening to the ideas of others. We may well have some ideas of our own.

Mr. Ashby: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to assure the House that the Government remain committed to a close and developing relationship with the Irish Government? Does he believe that the misunderstandings which arose after the recent summit have now been dispelled?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, I think that they have very largely been dispelled.

Mr. Flannery: Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that, contrary to the views of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor), when part of a country has been wrested from it by force of arms it is inevitable and natural that the rest of the country—the 26 counties as opposed to the six—should be interested in the future of that part? Moreover, does he realise that there will be no future except killing, bombing and so on unless discussions take place between the Republic and this country about the future of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hurd: When the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) says that something is inevitable, our doubts are automatically aroused. When he goes on to make a fundamentalist statement which is deeply unhelpful, our doubts become certainties.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that there will be no departure from the policy stated time and again by the Prime Minister that the future constitutional position of Northern Ireland is a matter for Her Majesty's Government, this House and the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hurd: The constitutional guarantee has been stated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and by successive Secretaries of State, and it stands.

Mr. McCusker: Despite what the Secretary of State said, does he accept that although there may be matters of mutual interest which should be discussed with the Government of the Irish Republic, the future of Northern Ireland should not be so discussed?

Mr. Hurd: I think that the position was made perfectly clear in the Chequers communiqué and in what was said after it by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself. I believe that the Irish Government are well aware of the constraints and limits thus set by ourselves, but within those constraints I believe that there is a good deal of useful and important work to be done.

Mr. Stanbrook: Following the question of the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs), who does my right hon. Friend regard as his "opposite number" in the Republic? Are not relations with sovereign states a matter for our right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Hurd: I did not take that point up at the time as it seemed somewhat captious to do so, but my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) is quite right. I believe that I am unique.

Milk Quotas

8. **Mr. Nicholson** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by the appeal panels and tribunals in processing milk quota appeals.

Dr. Boyson: The four local panels have considered virtually all the special case claims from some 3,900 producers. In addition, over 400 appeals have been considered from producers who requested a review of the initial rejection by the Department.

The tribunal received about 3,450 exceptional hardship claims and has dealt with about 80 per cent. of these, together with over 800 appeals against local panel decisions.

Mr. Nicholson: I welcome the fact that the tribunals and panels are finally coming to their conclusion, but is the Minister aware that many small producers in Northern Ireland received nothing when they went to the appeal tribunals and panels, and that they have been seriously disadvantaged by the fact that it was the large producers who appear to be receiving whatever milk quota is available?

Dr. Boyson: There are two problems here. The first is when somebody applies for extra quota and is rejected; secondly, there is the even greater problem of people who have been granted extra quota. We do not know until we have finished examining all the special claims how much of the allocation will be given to them. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is well aware of the problem, as are all the territorial Ministers involved in agriculture, and it is currently being examined.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, with regard to the appeals, the percentage of allocation given will be very small in terms of the amount of quota available? To follow what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) said, is the Minister also aware that it is not the large dairy farmer about whom we need to worry, but the small dairy farmer, who is making his living from a small number of cows?

Dr. Boyson: I am well aware of the problems which have been raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), who is obviously very knowledgeable about agriculture in Northern Ireland. I am also aware that the small dairy farmer, on certain issues, faces greater

problems than the large dairy farmer. The whole question of how much can be allocated to those who have succeeded in their appeals is being examined. Indeed, meetings are being held between the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and other territorial Ministers to see whether anything can be done to correct the Northern Ireland situation.

Flags and Emblems (Northern Ireland) Act

9. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy towards the repeal of the Flags and Emblems (Northern Ireland) Act.

Mr. Scott: The Government recognise that there are strong feelings in Northern Ireland both for and against repeal of the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (Northern Ireland) 1954. We have no plans for repeal, but the use of, and need for, the Act is kept under review.

Mr. McNamara: Why not repeal it? There have been no prosecutions under the Act, and the standing advisory commission on human rights almost 10 years ago recommended its repeal. This would eliminate a cause of annoyance to an important section of the community and would be one of the sympathetic gestures which we were led to understand we might get from the Prime Minister ever since she threw out the Forum report.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman has put forward one side of the argument. He will be as aware as I am that there is another side of the argument, and the Government will want to consider both sides before coming to a conclusion.

Mr. McCusker: Does the Minister agree that, irrespective of whether the Act is repealed, the police would still have to intervene when the flaunting of a flag or emblem was likely to lead to a breach of the peace?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman is right. The Act has not been used since at least 1969 and the Royal Ulster Constabulary is confident that it has sufficient powers under public order legislation to deal with any provocative use of flags or emblems.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: May we not dispense with this legislation when there is effective immunity for those who may wish to fly the Union Flag in the South?

Mr. Scott: I think that we want to look at legislation in Northern Ireland and how useful it is within the context of the situation there. We shall of course bear in mind my hon. Friend's views, together with all the others that are expressed on this matter.

Mr. Bell: Given the exchanges with the Minister, is it not a fact that the only time the Act was enforced in the mid-1960s it sparked off the Divis street riot, and as it appears that the same powers exist under the common law in order to prevent a breach of the peace, is not the Act superfluous and irrelevant, and should it not therefore be repealed?

Mr. Scott: The powers exist under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, and it is those powers that the RUC uses. That is a factor that we shall bear in mind in coming to a decision.

Loss of Employment (Compensation)

10. **Mr. William Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider making changes in the scheme for compensation for workers who have been forced to leave their employment, or who have been dismissed, for reasons directly attributable to the civil disturbances.

Dr. Boyson: I have no plans at present to do so, but I shall take note of any representations that the hon. Gentleman wishes to make.

Mr. Ross: Given that jobs are so scarce in Northern Ireland, is not the loss of a job, whether after six months or 20 years, for whatever reason, a very serious matter? Will the Minister look at the legislation for compensation that is tied to the redundancy payments scheme? After a short time at work some people have been forced out of their jobs by direct terrorist threats, and that is a very serious problem for them.

Dr. Boyson: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. The compensation scheme has been tied to the redundancy scheme. Anyone who has worked for a minimum of two years before being forced out of his job is already in the scheme. But if it is obvious that many people are being forced out within one or two years, we shall have to look again at the scheme.

Northern Ireland Assembly

11. **Mr. John M. Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the development of the role of the Northern Ireland Assembly and its functions.

Mr. Hurd: The detailed knowledge of local affairs brought by Members to the scrutinising functions of the Assembly's first phase has undoubtedly been helpful. What is required now is agreement on proposals for devolved government that would enable the Assembly to assume the powers envisaged in the Northern Ireland Act 1982: that remains the chief reason for its existence.

Mr. Taylor: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are many who believe in the Assembly and that it is doing a good job? Will he urge SDLP Members to accept that their constituents' best interests are not being served by their continued abstention, and will he prompt the Unionists into giving a lead in showing how useful powers might be acceptably given to the Assembly?

Mr. Hurd: In general I agree with my hon. Friend. I am looking forward to the future work of the Report Committee of the Assembly, because that work is central to the body's usefulness.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Can the Secretary of State enlighten us as to just how far he has progressed in his talks with the SDLP about its members taking their seats in the Assembly? Has he any statement to make to the House on that point?

Mr. Hurd: I make no secret of the fact that I should like to see the SDLP in the Assembly, but it sees great difficulties about that. It is essential that the elected leaders of the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland should find some means—whether inside the Assembly or without—of——

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Tebbit) *entered the Chamber*——

Mr. Hurd: May I take this opportunity to welcome back very warmly to the House my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and to congratulate him on the courage that he has shown throughout these past weeks? May I also ask him to convey our very best wishes to his wife?

Mr. Bell: As the duty officer of Her Majesty's Opposition, may I also take this opportunity of welcoming the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) back to his place in the House? To paraphrase the words of a song, we have grown accustomed to his style, and we wish, hope and pray that he is now restored to his full strength and vigour. May I add that that is the easiest supplementary question that the Secretary of State will have to answer all day?

Norah McCabe

12. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received calling for an inquiry into the death of Norah McCabe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Since 4 December 1984, one early-day motion, one parliamentary question, six letters from Members of Parliament, one letter on behalf of a political party and nine letters from members of the public have made representations for an inquiry into the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe.

Mr. Parry: The Secretary of State will be aware that early-day motion 195 is supported by 79 hon. Members and calls for an inquiry into the tragic and unnecessary death of a young mother of three children. Will he reconsider his decision not to hold a public inquiry, which he announced in a written reply to me of 20 December? Has any compensation been paid to the dependants of that unfortunate young woman?

Mr. Hurd: I have thought long and hard about that. There are two aspects. The first relates to possible action against individual police officers arising from the death. I cannot second-guess the independent decisions of the Director of Public Prosecutions, who has examined all the evidence, including the film, part of which was recently shown on television, and has come to that conclusion. I have no grounds nor standing to second-guess that.

The second aspect relates to the control of the use of plastic baton rounds, which I have also examined carefully. The House should know that every incident in which the Royal Ulster Constabulary now has to use those rounds is reported to me, and that the use of each round now has to be accounted for. *[Interruption.]* Yes, compensation has been given.

Mr. Bell: I appreciate the fullness and frankness of the Secretary of State's answer, but does he recall the statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State during the debate on the Baker report. He said:

"The law provides that any person may use only such force as is reasonable, and both the police and the Army in Northern Ireland have to operate within the law"?—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 645.]

Does the Secretary of State feel that the force used in the killing of an innocent bystander was reasonable in relation to the circumstances surrounding that death? If he does not, why does he not accede to the demands for an inquiry and establish culpability if there is culpability?

Mr. Hurd: I tried to explain in my original answer the reasons why I do not believe that I can second-guess the decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions, who had access to all the evidence available. I should modify slightly my last answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry). The action that Mrs. McCabe's husband brought against the Chief Constable for the death of his wife was settled out of court on 29 November for a substantial sum.

Funerals (Propaganda)

14. **Mr. Beggs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to prevent the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein from using the funerals of terrorists for propaganda purposes.

Mr. Scott: I know that paramilitary displays at funerals give great offence to many people. I am satisfied that the law makes adequate provision for the control of such funerals. It is for the commanders of the security forces on the ground to decide what action to take within the law, whether at the time or subsequently. They must balance the extent of the offence caused by a paramilitary display with the implications of intervention for public order and security.

Mr. Beggs: On behalf of the Ulster Unionists, may I welcome back the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, express our great pleasure at his recovery and our wish that it continues? I ask him to convey our good wishes to his good lady.

Is the Secretary of State not deeply concerned that Sinn Fein leaders have been openly involved in organising funerals for terrorists, at which volleys have been fired by other terrorists in Northern Ireland? Can he assure the House that the law is adequate to ensure and permit prosecution of those who organise such activities, and, if it is not, will he take steps to have the law so amended?

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend will have heard the opening remarks of the hon. Gentleman's question. I am satisfied that the law is adequate, but it must be for the judgment of the security forces on the spot whether they intervene in certain circumstances. In the past, people have been apprehended and convicted in those circumstances.

Rev. William McCrea: On behalf of the Democratic Unionist party, may I join with every hon. Member in welcoming the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) back to his rightful place in the Chamber, and convey every good wish to his good lady and pray that she will be restored to health and strength?

Does the Minister agree that paramilitary displays, such as those witnessed in Londonderry recently, are totally obnoxious to every decent citizen in Northern Ireland and should not be tolerated in any part of the United Kingdom? Why do the suffering citizens of Northern Ireland have to witness such a total disregard for the law of the land?

Mr. Scott: We have to rest on the judgment of the security forces commanders. The House will be aware that in certain circumstances intervention could put at risk other innocent lives. In those circumstances, the

commanders might judge that intervention was not to be preferred against the possibility of identification and subsequent apprehension.

Mr. McNamara: May I also welcome back the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and, in his own style, may I say that I look forward to the time when he is gracing the Opposition Front Bench?

What instructions are given to the RUC about removing tricolours from coffins?

Mr. Scott: The tricolour would normally be removed only in circumstances that were likely to cause a breach of the peace. The public order implications that we discussed on an earlier question would be taken into account. That is entirely different from the discharging of volleys over coffins by armed men.

Provisional Sinn Fein

16. **Mr. McCusker** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will instruct Northern Ireland civil servants and the employees of statutory bodies in Northern Ireland within his responsibility to refuse to meet or communicate with elected representatives of Provisional Sinn Fein.

Mr. Hurd: Contacts with such representatives are kept to the minimum, but, in the interests of constituents, and to ensure that administration is equitable, representations on purely constituency matters are dealt with at local level in a fair and proper manner.

Mr. McCusker: What aspects of the behaviour of Sinn Fein are so objectionable to the Secretary of State that they prevent him from meeting or communicating with its representatives? Why do they not apply to civil servants and those employed in statutory bodies, and to families, many of whose members may have been murdered by associates of Sinn Fein?

Mr. Hurd: It is right that Ministers should refuse to meet Sinn Fein representatives or to reply to letters from them until and unless Sinn Fein renounces violence. I make no apology for that. However, representations made on behalf of constituents must be dealt with properly and fairly in the interests of those constituents, which is why we have arrived at the procedure about which the hon. Gentleman knows.

Health and Social Service Boards (Staff)

17. **Rev. Martin Smyth** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of community doctors, nurses, psychiatric nurses, social workers and therapists employed by the various health and social service boards.

Mr. Scott: As the answer is in the form of a tabular statement I will, with permission, Mr. Speaker, arrange for it to be published in the *Official Report*.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Although I welcome the publication of the figures, is the Minister aware that there is growing concern that some vacancies in the community have not been filled? Is he further aware that some people suspect that this is an attempt to save money that will cause problems in the service given to patients? if there is to be a shift from care in hospitals to care in the community, will the Minister acknowledge that there must be adequate funding and staff to achieve that?

Mr. Scott: Of course, I recognise that. There has been the shift to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and there is provision for an expansion of community social workers in the immediate future.

Following are the figures:

	Eastern	*Western*	*Northern*	*Southern*
Community Doctors*	7½	3	7	4
Community Nurses	826	252	395	317
Community Psychiatric Nurses	33	25	8	14
Community Social Workers	444	110	188	103
Community Therapists	113	23	48	24

* Defined as specialists in community medicine.

The figures are as at 30 September 1984, except for community psychiatric nurses, which are at 13 December 1984.

Political Situation

18. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to prepare discussions with all interested political parties in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic on the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd: No, Sir.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State accept that those who believe that the last word has been said about Northern Ireland are sadly mistaken, and that the circumstances prove that to be true? Does he further accept that the future of Northern Ireland depends on many discussions and debates? Therefore, will he make it clear that, especially because the policy of the main Opposition party—the Labour party—is for a united Ireland, those discussions must continue with all interested parties, including the Republic?

Mr. Hurd: It would be rash indeed for anyone to predict the day when the last words had been spoken about Northern Ireland. There is an important distinction here which the hon. Gentleman constantly seeks to blur. The United Kingdom needs a good working relationship with the Republic of Ireland, but the initiative on discussions about the way in which the Province should be governed rests essentially with the elected leaders of the Province. I shall give any help or make any suggestions that I can to ease that process.

Mr. Steel: Will the Secretary of State lose no opportunity to make it clear to the populations of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic that the one thing that unites all parties in the House is our determined opposition to terrorism, and that we all rejoice to see the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry here this afternoon? We wish him and Mrs. Tebbit well.

Mr. Hurd: We are all grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

Security Forces

19. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he takes to publicise the role and achievements of the security forces in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend and I have taken, and will continue to take, every opportunity to publicise the

work and achievements of the security forces in Northern Ireland. Their work is commended in statements and speeches and during the course of radio, television and newspaper interviews. Attention is also drawn to the achievements of the security forces by the regular inclusion of statistics in the answers to parliamentary questions and in press releases and other publications, and by the briefing of journalists and others from home and abroad. Ministers also make well-publicised visits to units of the security forces in the Province.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Minister aware that there is a scurrilous campaign to discredit the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment — a campaign that is aided by naive members of the public who are not themselves connected with terrorism? Will he take steps to see that incidents in which members of the security forces are involved are more fully explained to the general public? We understand that, for security reasons, there must be constraints, but we feel that not enough is being done to put the case for the members of the security forces.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman appreciates the constraints that frequently exist when criminal charges may be brought in certain circumstances. However, I can certainly agree wholeheartedly with him that everything that promises to be effective against terrorism in Northern Ireland is subject to a scurrilous campaign designed to discredit it. Ministers will do their best to counter such campaigns.

PRIME MINISTER

Secretary of State for Energy

Q1. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Prime Minister if she will dismiss the Secretary of State for Energy.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): No, Sir.

Mr. Bidwell: Will the right hon. Lady explain to the House why the Secretary of State for Energy did not make better use of his meeting with the leaders of the Trades Unions Congress, led by that nice man Mr. Willis? As the pound slumps, and as further industrial action is contemplated in relation to the mining dispute, will the right hon. Lady do what Energy Ministers do not seem to be able to do, and get negotiations under way?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy makes excellent use of all his opportunities. In particular, he never fails to explain what an excellent offer the National Coal Board has made to the National Union of Mineworkers. It is better than any previous offer. Both my right hon. Friend and I hope that more and more men will continue to return to work.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Did my right hon. Friend notice that yesterday the Secretary of State for the Environment, after the National Economic Development Office meeting, said——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman will consult his Order Paper, he will see that the question refers to the Secretary of State for Energy.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Parry** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Parry: Will the Prime Minister take time today to study the recent report by Dr. Alex Scott-Samuel, which suggests that hundreds of people are dying from causes related to mass unemployment, including 150 on Merseyside? What steps does the Prime Minister or her Cabinet intend to take to reduce unemployment and those horrifying figures? If the right hon. Lady had shown half as much commitment to reducing unemployment as she has to attempting to destroy the NUM, the picture today would be very different.

The Prime Minister: If we had fewer strikes, people might have more confidence in goods produced in this country and might place more orders. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the only long-term way to reduce unemployment is to produce goods and services that people in this country and other countries will purchase, and that is the aim and purpose of the Government's policies.

Mr. Fox: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to give her support to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education's excellent proposals to introduce assessment of teachers? Will she accept that this innovation would have the overwhelming support of the vast majority of parents, who want the education of their children to be improved?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I gladly respond to my hon. Friend's invitation. I believe that my right hon. Friend's proposals meet with great support, especially from parents and from all who are interested in raising the standard of education in this country.

Mr. Hattersley: Has the Prime Minister had time today to read the report submitted yesterday to the National Economic Development Council, which describes the chronic deterioration in Britain's infrastructure? Will the Government provide the money to remedy the increasing decay of our schools, hospitals, public sector houses and roads and thereby concentrate available funds on what every objective authority agrees is the best way in which to reduce unemployment—public sector capital investment?

The Prime Minister: That question comes from a right hon. Member who belonged to a Government who reduced and smashed capital expenditure in many Departments, especially on roads, housing and hospitals. The Government have put a great deal of extra expenditure into hospitals and roads. This year, for example, investment in major roads will be 27 per cent. greater in real terms than in 1978-79. We are also putting greater investment into the water industry this year. The purpose of making public investment is that we get a good return, or because certain investment is necessary. The Government have a good record on public investment. Moreover, fixed investment across the economy was running at an all-time record in 1984.

Mr. Hattersley: The Prime Minister totally ducks the unemployment question, which is central to what I asked her. I therefore ask her again: does she, or does she not, accept the evidence that is now supplied to her, even by the Department of Trade and Industry, that by far the best way to reduce unemployment and create real jobs is through public investment in repairs and construction? Does she accept that evidence? If she denies it, or refuses to comment on it, we shall know what we have always suspected—that once more a Conservative Government choose higher unemployment because they have other priorities more consistent with the Conservative philosophy.

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman, or with what he says about what other people say. Public sector investment remains at about the same real level as it was during the last year of the Labour Government. We also have a record amount in fixed investment across the economy. I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's view that extra expenditure on infrastructure is the best way in which to increase employment. As the right hon. Gentleman is well aware, we spend £2 billion a year on special employment measures. That secures far more jobs than what he is proposing.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Faced with the growing stocks of chemical weapons in the Soviet Union, will my right hon. Friend make it crystal clear today that Great Britain will keep to its permanent policy of improving its defences against chemical attack and seeking international agreement on the banning of chemical weapons, and will not resort to the manufacture of chemical weaponry in Britain?

The Prime Minister: The facts are that Britain abandoned its chemical warfare capability in the late 1950s. There has been no change in Government policy since then, nor is any change now proposed. However, as a responsible Government, we have a duty to keep defence policy under review in the light of what my hon. Friend said about the massive Soviet capability in chemical weapons. As my hon. Friend said, the Government are playing a leading part in the international negotiations in Geneva for a comprehensive, verifiable and worldwide ban on these weapons, and we tabled important initiatives in March 1983 and February 1984 on verification and challenge inspections. We abandoned our chemical weapons. Any criticism should be directed at the Soviet Union for keeping a massive chemical warfare capability.

Dr. Owen: I welcome back the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and salute his courage.

Can we expect that the Confederation of British Industry's request for £1 billion of capital investment in our crumbling infrastructure will be given a rather better hearing than it has received recently? Will the Prime Minister deal with the Institute of Fiscal Studies' estimate that £1 billion of capital investment would create 165,000 jobs and that the same amount of money in tax reliefs would create only 30,000 jobs?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. As I said in reply to a previous question, the Government are spending, through the taxpayer, a considerable amount of money on infrastructure. This year, partly because of the drought, we are increasing investment in the water industry—it is 9 per cent. up. Investment in major roads is 27 per cent. greater than it was under the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member. I would not accept, and I do not know where he gets it from, that expenditure on infrastructure is the best way of increasing jobs. We get a far better deal for £2 billion expenditure on special measures, which, as he knows, helps 400,000 to 600,000 people.

With regard to alternative methods, I think that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned reductions in taxation. Reductions in taxation are one way of increasing net take-home pay without increasing industrial costs and therefore keeping competitiveness in industry.

Q3. **Mr. Blair** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister is saying that these works of infrastructure are not to be done now, when will they be done? Is she aware that delay is making the cure costlier? Does she not agree, at the very least, that any room for manoeuvre on Budget day should be dedicated to measures that increase investment in the infrastructure and thus combine necessity, efficiency and employment?

The Prime Minister: I do not quite understand why the hon. Gentleman is not hearing what I am saying about the amount spent on public sector investment. Public sector investment remains at about the same real level as in 1978-79. It is £24 billion. The extra spending on infrastructure does not gain anything like the same number of new jobs as spending on special measures. We spend £2 billion on special measures. That includes a great deal of training. That training also helps young people to be equipped for some of the science-based industries of the future. That, I believe, is the right way in which to increase employment possibilities.

Q5. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Proctor: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that during 1985 the main economic target will be the continued control and reduction in the level of inflation, as this is likely to lead to the greatest number of people in employment and to a potential increase in employment?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We shall, of course, maintain our objective of continuing to reduce inflation. I understand that that might even find support on the Opposition side of the House, as I recall the occasion in December 1978 when the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said:

"Our immediate intention is to hold the inflation rate at or about its present level. Our eventual aim is to reduce the figure to the level enjoyed by our most successful competitors, for unless we achieve our objectives none of our other policies—economic growth, lower unemployment, higher investment and improved services financed by public expenditure—can fully succeed."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1978; Vol. 960, c. 677.]

Mr. Alfred Morris: In December it was widely reported that the Prime Minister would be considering the

Stansted report during the recess. What is her reaction to it? Is she aware that a quick and definitive rejection of the inspector's recommendations is wanted by hundreds of us on both sides of the House, not least by those from the north, where even the thought of £1 billion-plus expenditure at Stansted excites not just outright opposition but anger?

The Prime Minister: I hope that many hon. Members had a very interesting recess, as I did, reading that report and that they will be ready to have a debate in the House. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that I can say nothing whatsoever about it, for obvious reasons. We are committed to having a parliamentary debate before too long, I hope, before the Government make up their mind. By the time we have that debate, I hope that hon. Members will have read the report.

Q6. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official enagagements for Thursday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. McDonald: Why, in the answers that she has given about public investment, has the Prime Minister consistently ignored the fact that the NEDC report talks about many million of pounds worth of repairs still to be carried out to roads, sewers and houses in particular?—*[Interruption.]* Why has she ignored housing and the fact that many people are living in gross discomfort in damp and dismal homes and that repairs to those dwellings would make their lives far more comfortable and would provide many jobs—*[Interruption.]* Is she aware that a moderate spending of £1 billion a year would provide between 70,000 and 100,000 more jobs each year, and will she cease to dismiss this as unimportant?

The Prime Minister: In so far as I could hear the hon. Lady, I repeat that on public sector investment this Government are spending some £24 billion. There has been a switch of emphasis on housing—as people want —from public to private sector, and that reflects this Government's belief that most people wish to own their own homes. Owner-occupation rose by 1·7 million between 1979 and 1984, and the hon. Lady clearly criticises the Labour Government's housing record because the dwelling stock rose by 900,000 between 1979 and 1984.

Mr. Flannery: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order after the private notice question unless they arise directly from Question Time.

Mr. Flannery: My point of order is about questions, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Prime Minister constantly to read all her answers instead of answering questions in a proper way?

Mr. Speaker: Everyone has his own method of dealing with questions in this House, and it is not a matter for me.

Mr. Flannery: She is cribbing.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Putney (Explosion)

3.31 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the explosion which occurred this morning in Putney.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): The House will be aware that at 7.12 am this morning there was an explosion at Newnham house, Manor Fields estate, Putney, in London.

I have to inform the House, with great regret, that the latest information is that three people have died, six are unaccounted for, and a further two are in hospital.

Rescue operations are still in progress. Emergency services were quickly on the scene, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, in whose constituency the explosion occurred, has told me of the skill and bravery being shown by the rescue services working in the present dangerous conditions.

While it has not yet been possible to establish with certainty the cause of the explosion, all the evidence available at present points to it being a gas explosion. Responsibility for gas safety rests with the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. A team of inspectors from the executive reached the site early this morning. An investigation team from SE Gas is also already present at the scene. The Health and Safety Commission has now set up an inquiry under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act, and I have asked the chairman to let me have a preliminary report at the earliest moment.

I know that the whole House will join me in extending our deepest sympathy to those bereaved, injured and homeless as a result of this tragic occurrence.

Mr. Soames: The House will appreciate that, apart from the great concern and interest felt by all hon. Members, I ask this question at the request, and on behalf, of my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), who because of his ministerial duties is unable to do so.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the inquiry by the Health and Safety Executive will be conducted with the greatest urgency and that the report will be published as soon as it is to hand? Will he also pass on to the emergency services the gratitude and admiration of hon. Members for the great skill and courage which they have shown?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can confirm my request that the report should be prepared at the earliest opportunity. I understand that it is the intention of the commission that the report should be published, and I certainly support that.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): May I on behalf of this side of the House express our deepest sympathy to the injured, to the relatives of those who have so tragically died and to the homeless as a result of this explosion? May I also express our appreciation and admiration for the immediacy of the response of the police and our emergency services who are continuing to deal with the emergency? Since the Secretary of State has said that the report will be published, may I ask him how long he believes the report will take to prepare and whether the interim report will lead to a statement being made by him?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this is the first domestic gas explosion to be investigated by the Health and Safety Executive since it took over responsibility in 1984? Will he ask the executive to look at the extent of gas explosions, despite the very good safety record of the gas board, during the last five years and to include an assessment in the final report?

Mr. King: I am very grateful to the hon. Member for his expressions of sympathy and respect and of admiration for the emergency services. The House will know that they have been working throughout the morning in a very dangerous structure, with gas still escaping. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department himself told me of the great courage being shown by people who are working with great dedication in very dangerous circumstances. Therefore, the tribute paid by the hon. Gentleman and by my hon. Friend is well deserved.

Obviously it is not possible for me at this stage to answer the hon. Gentleman's two questions about whether it will be appropriate to make a further statement on any interim findings, but certainly I take note of his interest and of the concern of the House to be kept informed. I shall be anxious to ensure that that is done in the most appropriate way. In terms of the general safety record, it is worth remembering that there are 16 million gas consumers and that there are 9 million central heating gas installations. Last year there were 25 serious explosions. It is interesting to note that the figures show a steadily declining trend over the past three years and give some indication of generally very high standards of safety within the gas industry.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I extend my sympathy to the bereaved and the injured and also my admiration for those public services which have had to deal with the results of the explosion, but, when the inquiry is completed, could public authorities and private owners of blocks of flats where there are gas installations be requested to have a further look at their installations with a view to increasing awareness of the danger of such explosions? I believe that this is something which the House must take into consideration.

Mr. King: I pay tribute to the general standards of safety, but my hon. Friend's wise words of caution—that people should be aware of the importance of taking proper precautions—are most important, and the general guidance of British Gas and the area gas boards should be closely followed.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Liberal and Social Democratic parties with the expressions of sympathy and the recognition of the work done by the emergency services. I am sure that all London Members will want to join me in saying that.

May I ask that the proper inquiry that is to be conducted by the Health and Safety Executive should be extended as soon as possible to look at the two clearly related matters which are often of great concern to all of us and to the public: first, the immediacy of the response to emergencies of the statutory undertakings—not only the gas board—and, secondly, the need for money to be made available where it is required for the maintenance of the infrastructure, in this case piping, if in bad weather such as that which we have experienced recently it is shown that that is a contributory factor to the inability to

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

deal quickly or properly with complaints about the gas service such as those which have been made in recent weeks, we understand, in Putney?

Mr. King: I would rather not comment on the latter part of what the hon. Gentleman said in advance of even the preliminary findings of any inquiry, but I should like to put it on record that my understanding is that a reported gas leak was recorded by SE Gas at 7.2 am, that the explosion occurred at 7.12 am, and that the response of SE Gas was so fast that a van was outside at the time of the explosion. There was some concern that the gas safety inspector was inside at the time of the explosion, but happily that proved not to be the case. However, that shows the speed with which the statutory undertakers responded to the call.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister confirm that this is the second occasion within the past six months when Ministers have felt it necessary to praise the professionalism and integrity of public sector workers in non-profit making industries such as the National Health Service, the ambulance service and others connected with rescues? As Secretary of State for Employment, will he give a guarantee that when those people put in for a wage increase they will not be subjected to denigration and that if they have to go on strike to further that claim they will not be further attacked by the Government?

Mr. King: I do not think that the House would expect me to respond on this occasion to that intervention.

Business of the House

3.41 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Trustee Savings Banks Bill and of the Water (Fluoridation) Bill.

Remaining stages of the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill.

TUESDAY 15 JANUARY—Opposition Day (5th Allotted Day). A debate on an Opposition motion on the reduction of unemployment through public investment.

Motion on the Food Imitation (Safety) Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY — Motions on the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 2) 1984-85, (No. 3) 1983-84, and on the Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1985-86.

Motion on the Welsh Rate Support Grant Report 1985-86.

Motions on the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order and on the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—There will be a debate on a Government motion on regional policy.

Motions on the Assisted Areas Order, the Regional Development Grant (Qualifying Activities) Order and on the Regional Development Grant (Prescribed Percentage, Amount of Limit) Order.

FRIDAY 18 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 21 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Hong Kong Bill.

Mr. Hattersley: The Leader of the House will recall the Opposition's hope that the House would soon debate in Government time the threatened post office closure programme. Will such a debate be arranged?

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman will also recall that we are anxiously awaiting an opportunity to debate the Government's Green Paper on long-term public expenditure options. May I once more repeat the request that that debate is held sufficiently early to enable the Chancellor of the Exchequer to take part in it before the Budget?

Thirdly, there have been great expectations that a statement would be made this week on the privatisation of British Airways. When will that statement be made?

Finally, could the Leader of the House find some time next week to remind the Prime Minister that when I made the speech that she so flatteringly quoted unemployment in Britain was rather more than 2 million less than it is today?

Mr. Biffen: I am flattered that I should be required to go in to bat for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) in respect of his last point, but of course I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to his observation.

I am not aware of any plans for a statement to be made next week on the privatisation of British Airways, but I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the right hon. Gentleman's interest.

It might be helpful to the House if we were to await the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee which is now considering long-term public expenditure before we debated that.

I have looked at the matter of Post Office closures. Clearly it is a topic of great interest to the House. None the less, it falls very much within the remit of the Post Office and I can offer no Government time for a debate on the topic. However, I have no doubt that it will fall within the designation of public investment to which the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will be drawing the attention of the House on Tuesday.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the growing public concern about the commercial exploitation of surrogate motherhood. He will also be aware that the Warnock committee made a strong recommendation that there should be early legislation and that that was echoed when the House debated the matter before Christmas. May we expect an early statement of the Government's intentions about laying legislation this Session?

Mr. Biffen: I very much endorse what my right hon. Friend says about the importance of this topic. The matter is now under consideration and I shall draw the points he makes to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): In view of the method, which is controversial from a constitutional point of view, being adopted by the Government to secure approval for an additional payment to the European Economic Community, may we be assured that there will be full opportunity for debate not only of the Estimate but of the authorising statute?

Mr. Biffen: I shall give further consideration to that point.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Will the expected debate on Stansted take place before 31 January, and is there any truth in the rumour that it will be spread over two days?

Mr. Biffen: I would not wish to tie myself either to specific dates or to rumours. My hon. Friend clearly speaks for many, however, when he underlines the importance of having an early debate.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his previous comments on the closure of post offices—bearing in mind that their closure has much wider concern than exists within the remit of the post office itself—and find time, possibly on a motion for the Adjournment of the House, to debate the subject?

Is there any possibility of debating at an early date the question of penalising strikers in relation to housing benefit, a matter which is raised in early-day motion 247, which is in the form of a prayer and which stands in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends?

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Housing Benefits Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1965), dated 17th December 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th December, be annulled.]

Will there be the possibility of an early debate on matters pertaining particularly to youth? I understand that the right hon. Gentleman received sympathetically an all-party delegation recently in connection with International Youth Year. Is there any likelihood of a debate on matters which are of particular concern to younger members of the community?

Mr. Biffen: I recognise the importance of the whole issue of the future of the post office structure, but I can go no further than I went in my reply to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

I regret that I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman the prospect of Government time to debate the other two matters he raised, but as an experienced parliamentarian he will be aware that there are other opportunities that he can pursue.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Is there likely to be a statement next week about the need for an RAF trainer replacement aircraft? Recently there was a short list of two which did not include Firecracker. There is considerable uncertainty, and I understand that the short list has been extended to include Firecracker. Is my right hon. Friend aware that many thousands of jobs in the east midlands depend on Firecracker being selected and that the sooner there is a statement the better?

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate the serious constituency factors which are involved for my hon. Friend. I shall draw the attention of the Secretary of State for Defence to the points he makes and to the desirability of an early statement.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Leader of the House aware that a fourth group of academic accountants and economists has now challenged the accounting arrangements of the National Coal Board and that in response the NCB has appointed independent accountants to assess the board's accounting techniques? In the light of those facts, is it not time that the House was given an opportunity to debate this highly important matter, particularly as many of us believe that the solution to the dispute lies in our understanding, and the Government having a further appreciation of, what changes can be made?

Mr. Biffen: There seem to be as many interpretations of the finances of the NCB as there are accountants to take part in this practice. There is no time available next week for the Government to promote a debate on this topic, but undoubtedly there are many other opportunities open to hon. Members such as the hon. Gentleman, and I have no doubt that they will take advantage of them.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Returning to the issue of a debate on Stansted and terminal 5 at Heathrow, as we now know that the next sitting of the Standing Committee on the Civil Aviation Bill is scheduled for 12 February, is it not a fair assumption that any debate on Stansted and terminal 5 should desirably take place before then?

Mr. Biffen: I am ever anxious to be helpful to the House on this matter because I know that the House is trying to be helpful to me. However, I cannot go any further than what I have already said on the subject, and that was intended to be helpful.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Leader of the House aware of the widespread concern about the tremendous difficulties faced by pensioners and others on

[Mr. David Winnick]

limited incomes in trying to keep their homes warm in the present cold spell? Why has no Minister come to the Dispatch Box this week, nor shown any willingness to do so next week, to make a statement on this matter? Does this demonstrate the Government's indifference to such suffering?

Mr. Biffen: Politicians are becoming thin on arguments when they have to engage in spurious accusations of comparative morality and compassion.

Mr. Winnick: The right hon. Gentleman does not have any trouble.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman is as well provided as I am. I shall draw his anxiety to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the interest of hon. Members on both sides of the House in the Prime Minister's recent and successful tour of the world and its consequential negotiations. When may we expect either a statement or a debate on the subject?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot hold out hope of a statement, but I shall bear in mind that at some point there will be a natural occasion for a debate on foreign affairs. The Second Reading debate on the Hong Kong Bill will enable the House to express a view on the matter.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): When the Leader of the House considers the method of payment to the EEC for the supplementary budget for 1984, as he intimated to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that he would, will he bear in mind the background to this matter? Would it not be singularly unfortunate if, in addition to a debate on the Supplementary Estimate itself, there was not an opportunity—not necessarily all night—to debate the Second Reading of the appropriate special Consolidated Bill?

Mr. Biffen: That is taking the matter considerably wider than is necessary—the hon. Gentleman's smile confirms that.

Mr. Spearing: No.

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry; perhaps the hon. Gentleman never smiles. I shall take account of what he has said.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): May I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider his answer about a debate on post office closures? I draw to his attention the fact that just before Christmas it was announced that two sub-post offices in my constituency were to close, a decision that will cause enormous hardship and suffering if it goes through. Should not this be challenged on the Floor of the House in a debate on the subject, and not left to someone who may be fortunate enough to squeeze the matter in during a debate on public expenditure?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a powerful constituency point, and it would be appropriate if he were to seek his good fortune in an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that at Croydon coroner's court this morning the coroner recorded an open verdict on the death of Peter Nadin on the Greek island of Mikonos last summer? In view of that, should not the Foreign Office be pursuing the Greek Government with great vigour to ensure that we get a full report of the circumstances surrounding the death of this person outside a police station on that island? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement to the House?

Mr. Biffen: I was not aware of the decision of the coroner's court, but I shall represent to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary the points that have been made.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): As the subject of chemical weapons has been raised, will my right Friend take account of the fact that many Conservative Members feel that it is almost close to negligence that, whereas the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact forces handle and train regularly with these ghastly weapons, our forces have no experience of them and, therefore, in the event of hostilities, they would be far more likely to be used than if there were a more balanced position?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says. I am afraid that I can be no more forthcoming than to say that there will be no opportunity for a debate on chemical weapons in Government time next week.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): How does the Leader of the House respond to the complaint of Mr. Justice James McClelland, the chairman of the Australian Royal Commission investigating the events during the 1950s at Maralinga in Western Australia, that the British Government have stymied the work of the Royal Commission and that he has to carry out the inquiry with his hands tied behind his back? Is it not outrageous that a Royal Commission should meet in this country to investigate the problems of Australian ex-service men when such a right is not afforded to our own ex-service men?

Mr. Biffen: There is a wide range of parliamentary opportunities for raising points such as that.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend go a little further than he did in responding to my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) about surrogate motherhood? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of public disgust at surrogate motherhood for gain and the intense wish throughout the country for early legislation to prevent such action in the future. Will my right hon. Friend be more forthcoming about when we shall have such legislation?

Mr. Biffen: If I were able to be more forthcoming, I should have "forthcomed". There is, of course, appreciation of the great public interest in this matter. It is now under consideration, and as soon as a Minister can appropriately come to the House to make a further statement that will be done.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Is the Leader of the House aware that the article written by five academic accountants which was suppressed from the magazine *Accountancy* in December last year has now been published with little change, although there has been consultation with the National Coal Board? The Leader of the House said to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that the Government cannot find time for a debate on the accountants' report or

other reports and the present coal mining dispute. Will he ask the Secretary of State for Energy to make a statement on this issue which is the fundamental cause of the present coal mining dispute?

Mr. Biffen: I am not sure that I would accept the hon. Gentleman's conclusion, but as he has made this request I shall gladly accede to it and convey to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy the anxieties that have been expressed that a statement should be made on the NCB's methods of accounting.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): In view of the Opposition requests for a debate on the coal strike and on heating costs, does my right hon. Friend agree that, if Opposition time were used for a debate on the coal strike, the House would be given a chance to explore how the strike is not only destroying jobs outside, and ultimately inside, the coal industry but unnecessarily increasing heating costs?

Mr. Biffen: That is perfectly true, but, alas, we shall not have that opportunity next week.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that, if we had managed to obtain a statement on the NCB's accounting procedures, we might have been able to raise the question of the strange accounting procedures criteria that are acceptable to the Government when dealing with banks? Will the right hon. Gentleman explain or call upon any other Minister to explain why those banks whose reserves are exhausted, which are uneconomic units of production and have crooks running them are able to get a nod and a wink from the Government to save them and to receive more than £75 million from the Bank of England—the taxpayers' bank—to save them, yet, when——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: I am almost done.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is business questions. The hon. Member should be asking whether a debate can be held on these matters and not asking the Leader of the House to give a definitive answer.

Mr. Skinner: During such a statement or debate, the Minister could draw a comparison with the shabby treatment received by the miners when they called on the National Coal Board to adopt proper accounting procedures that would show that every pit in Britain was economic.

Mr. Biffen: I have a warm affection for the hon. Gentleman in the way in which he pursues diversionary tactics for a dying cause. That is precisely the position he is in. I can go no further than I have already gone on the question of the representations I shall make to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. I shall, of course, append the hon. Gentleman's voice to the voices of those hon. Members who have already spoken on the subject.

BILL PRESENTED

Hong Kong

Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. John Biffen, Mr. Attorney-General, and Mr. Richard Luce, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the ending of British sovereignty and jurisdiction over Hong Kong: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 56.]

Orders of the Day

Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Last May, when I declared the Government's intention to introduce an outgoers compensation scheme for milk producers as part of the milk quota arrangements, I said that I should seek legislation as soon as possible to provide the necessary statutory authority for the payments that we intended to make under the scheme. The primary purpose of the Bill is to provide that authority.

The outgoers scheme is one element in the Community supplementary levy arrangements for milk. The introduction of the arrangements after last year's price fixing was intended to achieve an immediate cut in production in most member states in an attempt to restrain the growing surplus in the dairy sector and the ever-growing expense to the Community of disposing of that surplus. In 1983-84, the milk sector alone was supported under the common agricultural policy to the tune of more than £3 billion of Community money, with the prospect that this would rise to about £4 billion in 1984-85 and exceed budget provision unless drastic measures were taken to curb over-production.

As I have often told the House, we argued strenuously in Brussels for action via the price mechanism, but it became clear that other member states would not agree to price cuts of the severity necessary to deal with the problem. The only prospect for effective action to tackle the surplus was therefore through a quota scheme, and agreement was accordingly reached on a package of measures involving quota for each milk producer and a supplementary levy on milk produced in excess of quota.

In the United Kingdom the introduction of quotas required an immediate cut in production of 6·15 per cent. by comparison with the 1983-84 marketing year if producers were to avoid supplementary levy. In addition to this we felt it necessary, in accordance with provisions in the Community legislation, to provide a reserve of wholesale quota for reallocation to producers who satisfied special case criteria. About 2·5 per cent. of the United Kingdom quota was held back to fund the reserve for special cases. Overall, then, with the production cut and the amount withheld for the special case reserve, United Kingdom wholesale producers' primary quota allocations —that is, their basic quotas—have been set at 9 per cent. below their 1983 production levels.

It is a matter of common consent that one group of producers has been particularly hard hit by the imposition of production quotas — the small specialist producers who have no alternative to milk production because of the kind of farms that they occupy and little scope to adapt their dairy enterprises to lower levels of production under the quota system. We wanted to do something to help those smaller producers. In England and Wales, those producing less than 200,000 litres per year represent about 40 per cent. of all milk producers. Our aim is to enable those producers to return to their 1983 levels of production without becoming liable to supplementary levy. We also decided, particularly in the light of the views expressed by hon. Members in the debate on 3 July, to make provision to help producers who might suffer exceptional hardship because of the introduction of quotas.

On the other hand, we felt that there were many producers, especially small producers, who would be willing to leave dairying altogether if means were found to make it easier for them to give up production and to move into some new enterprise or, for those of retirement age, to leave agriculture altogether. The quota released by those producers could then be reallocated. We estimated that for Great Britain about 1·25 per cent. of total quota would be needed to meet our objective of helping those small producers who wished to stay in milk production.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The Minister's tone of argument seems to suggest that the Government want to get rid of small producers and look after the interests of the big ones.

Hon. Members: No!

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood, as the reaction of my hon. Friends shows. That is not what I was saying.

We added a further 1 per cent. to the 1·25 per cent. to assist other categories of producer particularly adversely affected by the introduction of quotas. The objective, therefore, was to buy up 2·25 per cent. of the total quota in Great Britain. In Northern Ireland we set the objective at 5 per cent. of quota in view of the greater reliance on dairying, the rate of expansion in the past few years and the number of small producers there.

The quickest and most effective way of releasing the extra quota needed was to introduce an outgoers scheme under which producers would receive compensation in return for surrendering their quota, which would then be reallocated to those in particular need. Our outgoers scheme accordingly came into operation on 24 July.

Naturally, it has been necessary to impose certain conditions on participants in the scheme. First, they must surrender their quotas in full and will not be able to return to milk production so long as the quota scheme is in operation. Secondly, tenants in England and Wales will have to obtain their landlords' consent to surrender their quota. I am aware that this has led to difficulties for some tenant farmers, but in many cases it has been possible for landlords and tenants to reach amicable agreements allowing the tenant to become an outgoer. The House may be interested to know that 45 per cent. of the payments that we have made under the scheme so far have gone to tenant farmers. That is an important figure, which may surprise many hon. Members. Many tenants have therefore been able to reach agreement with their landlords and I am grateful to the president of the Country Landowners Association for recommending to his members that before any decisions are taken they discuss them with, and consult fully, any of their tenants interested in becoming outgoers.

As regards the cost, we are devoting up to £50 million to the scheme over five years at a rate of 13p per litre of quota surrendered, or the equivalent of about £650 per cow at a yield of 5,000 litres per cow. The response shows this to be a reasonable incentive.

The last feature of our outgoers scheme to which I should like to draw attention is its non-statutory nature.

There were several reasons why we felt it necessary to introduce the scheme without specific parliamentary authority.

First, it was vital to the success of the scheme that it be brought into operation urgently so as to encourage outgoers to surrender their quota before they had used up too much of their 1984-85 allocation. There was, however, no existing United Kingdom legislation on which we could base an outgoers scheme. The Community provision allowing the payment of compensation to outgoers is permissive only and member states are not under any Community obligation to introduce outgoers schemes. For this reason, section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972 did not provide powers for the introduction of a statutory outgoers scheme, although it provided for the introduction of other parts of the supplementary levy arrangements through the dairy produce quota regulations 1984 which were made under section 2 of the Act.

We therefore decided that it would be best to introduce the outgoers scheme on a non-statutory basis and to introduce legislation providing full authority for payments at a later date. Until this legislation was obtained, payments could be made under the authority of the Appropriation Act and the payments that we have made so far have been made under that Act. It is, however, a general principle that the extent to which, and the time for which, payments are made under the Appropriation Act should be minimised. As we had made provision to spend up to £50 million over five years, it was clearly right that specific statutory authority should be obtained as soon as an opportunity in the legislative programme could be found. I made it clear at an early stage that I would seek this authority as soon as possible. Hon. Members may recall that in the meantime I put copies of the Milk Supplementary Levy (Outgoers) Scheme in the Vote Office and the Library prior to our debate on the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984 on 18 July last year.

I hope I have explained to the House in sufficient detail the need for the Bill. I now turn to the Bill itself and outline clause by clause—there are only seven clauses—what it is intended to do.

Its primary purpose, as I have indicated, is to provide the necessary specific statutory authority to pay compensation to milk producers who agree to discontinue milk production and to surrender their quotas to our reserve. This power is contained in clause 1 and gives effect to part of article 4 of Council Regulation 857 of 1984. This article allows member states to

"grant to producers undertaking to discontinue milk production definitively compensation paid in one or more annual instalments".

This article of Community legislation is the fountainhead of the outgoers scheme.

As far as the existing scheme is concerned, payments made in pursuance of the scheme once the Bill is enacted will then be made under the authority of the Bill. Until that time, as I have said, the Appropriation Act will provide the necessary authority. The power to pay compensation contained in clause 1 will cover not only payments made under the existing scheme but also payments under any future scheme.

In addition to this general authority to pay compensation, clause 1 also contains powers which will enable any future outgoers scheme to be made by statutory instrument.

Although no further schemes are planned to succeed the scheme currently in operation, I believe that, as primary legislation is being sought at this time, the opportunity should be taken to provide for statutory schemes should there ever be the need for another outgoers scheme in the future, and I hope the House will agree to that.

Clause 1 also provides that any money paid out under a scheme may be recovered if the person who receives the payment fails to comply with the conditions of a scheme. I am sure hon. Members will agree that public funds should be protected in this way. It would not be right for a producer who had received public money to retain that money after failing to comply with any undertakings he had made to qualify for payment.

I am sure that hon. Members will also appreciate on similar grounds the need for the powers of entry on to land and inspection of records contained in clause 2. The purpose of this clause is to enable checks to be made to ensure that recipients of compensation under an outgoers scheme are not involved in milk production.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South, Down): Before the Minister leaves clause 1, will he make it clear whether there is any obstacle under the Bill or under Community legislation to the use of a quota bought in any particular region to inure to the benefit of producers or purchasers in other regions in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Jopling: I shall check the answer that I give to the right hon. Gentleman, but as I understand it there is no immediate bar to a quota bought in one part of a member state being transferred to another. I shall check that and, if it is mistaken, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will allow my hon. Friend the Minister to refer to it in his winding-up speech.

I can assure the House that we have taken care to draft as narrowly as possible the powers provided by clause 2 consistent with the aim of enforcing the conditions of our scheme and of preventing the abuse of public money.

Clause 3 deals with offences and the penalty to which people will be liable if convicted of those offences. A person will commit an offence if he gives false information or obstructs an authorised officer in order to obtain or retain payment whether on his own behalf or on somebody else's. On summary conviction, the penalty will bea fine of up to level 5 on the standard scale, which currently stands at £2,000.

Clause 4 provides in the usual way that payments made to producers in accordance with clause 1 shall be made out of money provided by Parliament, and that any money recovered where producers fail to comply with the conditions of payment shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Clause 5 defines the Ministers who may exercise functions under the Bill. It means in effect that any future schemes should be made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretary of State for Wales or the Secretary of State for Scotland acting either individually or together in any combination.

Clause 6 applies only to Northern Ireland. Our existing outgoers scheme applies throughout the United Kingdom, but for constitutional reasons this Bill does not apply, with the exception, of course, of this clause, to Northern Ireland. This clause simply provides that an Order in Council which is made for the same purpose as in clauses 1 to 3 of the Bill shall be subject to the negative resolution procedure.

[Mr. Jopling]

Normally, an Order in Council in the transferred functions field would be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, but as the order which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland intends to lay before the House immediately after the enactment of the Bill will replicate its main provisions, we have thought it appropriate to provide that the order may be made subject to the quicker negative resolution procedure. This will make it easier for the main elements of the Bill to be given effect in Northern Ireland as nearly as possible at the same time as the Bill comes into effect in the rest of the United Kingdom.

As a safeguard, the wording of the clause ensures that the negative resolution procedure may be used only where the Order in Council does what the Bill does.

Clause 7 deals with the short title, commencement and extent of the Bill. It provides that, with the exception of clause 6, the Bill will not come into effect for two months after it is enacted. The purpose is to allow my right hon. Friend time to obtain his Order in Council to introduce similar arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): The Minister has referred to the possibility of future schemes and, as he will be the first to appreciate, future schemes will be introduced by way of statutory instrument subject to annulment. As my right hon. Friend knows, such a statutory instrument procedure is not subject to amendment in the House. Would he feel able to give an undertaking to the House that, if there should be a future scheme, he would always lay before the House draft regulations which would be the subject of discussion and subsequent amendment?

Mr. Jopling: I shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's point, and it is an issue I would clearly expect to be discussed in Committee of the Bill. If I might ponder on that point, we can them come to our conclusion and announce it to the House at the appropriate time in Committee.

I hope that I have provided the House with a clear exposition of the Bill now before us.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Before my right hon. Friend is too sure that he has done that, will he tell the House where the legislative provision is to be found entitling the recipient to compensation under the outgoers scheme to elect for tax purposes whether it is treated as capital or income? I cannot see any such provision in the Bill. Where is the legislative provision for that circumstance which he described in introducing the original regulations, although not on a statutory basis?

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware that matters of taxation are for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and not for me. That is the reason that, as a matter of consequent taxation, this does not come into the Bill. While I cannot do it off the top of my head, I am sure that it is possible to think of many precedents for arrangements to be made in one Bill and the tax treatment of them to be dealt with in existing or future legislation. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that that point will be covered in other legislation that will be available to enable that situation to occur.

Hon. Members will see that it is a short and relatively straightforward Bill. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State in my Department made clear in our debate on quotas on 18 July last year, its purpose primarily is to put the payment of compensation to milk outgoers on a firm statutory basis. I am aware that certain sections of the media have misunderstood the purpose of the Bill as setting up a new outgoers scheme in addition to the one we already have. This, as I hope I have made clear in my remarks today, is not the case. The Bill is intended to cover the existing scheme and although it would allow another scheme to be set up on a statutory basis, neither I nor any of my right hon. Friends are considering introducing a further new scheme at the present time.

The closing date for applications to take part in this scheme was 28 August 1984. As we are now right in the middle of processing applications and inviting selected producers to make firm offers, I think this is an opportune moment for me to report to the House what progress we are now making with the outgoers scheme.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many hon. Members received, either yesterday or today, representations from the National Farmers' Union concerning the present outgoers scheme, and asking that the Bill should be passed as speedily as possible. However, it also pointed out that our attention should be drawn to its inadequacies, especially with regard to meeting the hardship of development cases. In that respect we have been invited to urge the Government to consider an extension of the present scheme. Will my right hon. Friend comment on the NFU's suggestion? If he cannot do so now, perhaps his colleague can do so at the end of the debate.

Mr. Jopling: Given the difficulties of extracting the original £50 million from the Treasury and the problems —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Any one who has ever tried to extract £50 million from the Treasury knows that that is no mean feat. But given the Government's desire— which has my full support — to reduce Government expenditure, I can give no promise of an extension of the scheme, as that would mean that more public money would be needed at this difficult time.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, but I think that this had better be the last time.

Mr. Hicks: Bearing in mind the very traumatic experience that the whole principle of imposing milk quotas has had not only on individual producers but on the countryside as a whole, is it not a desirable objective to allow those who wish to take advantage of the outgoers scheme to do so, so that, conversely, those who wish to remain in milk can get as large a quota as possible?

Mr. Jopling: In theory my hon. Friend has brought us a worthy objective from Cornwall. But there is the problem of public spending. However, I hope to give some idea now of how the scheme has gone——

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jopling: This must be the last intervention.

Sir John Farr: The House is a little uneasy about what my right hon. Friend said to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), inasmuch as a parallel order introduced in relation to another subject is not in any way

amendable. Surely it would be an inappropriate vehicle to use unless there was a draft order first. In echoing what my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham said, may I ask whether, if a similar order was introduced, it would be likely to relate to milk or to some other agricultural commodity?

Mr. Jopling: My remarks so far about powers for any further scheme apply to milk and not to any other commodity. But I must now get on with my speech.

The initial response was very encouraging, with producers expressing interest accounting for almost nine per cent. of total United Kingdom quota. Thus, in national terms, the scheme was heavily over-subscribed, though regionally the response varied, and overall we expected a significant number of applicants—for example, those whose special case claims were successful—to drop out once they had clarified their exact position. That is, in fact, precisely what has happened.

In England and Wales, 4,826 producers came forward with offers of 1,186 million litres in a full year, which is about four times the planned target of 289 million litres, In Scotland, offers amounted to 9·5 per cent. of quota for Scotland, which is about four times the planned target of 29·8 million litres. We decided, therefore, to give priority to the smallest producers most dependent on dairying, that is, those with fewer than 200,000 litres in England and Wales, and with fewer than 268,000 litres in Scotland. A small number of producers for whom milk is a relatively small part of their total enterprise have also been excluded.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: I have given way much more than most hon. Members do, and I must now make some progress.

Our first invitations went out to some 2,747 producers with 200,000 litres or less of primary quota allocation in England and Wales, and to 168 producers in Scotland with 268,000 litres or less. As soon as it became clear that a significant proportion of these producers were not going to become outgoers after all, we sent out further invitations in England and Wales in tranches of 25,000 or 50,000 litre increases, beginning with those having between 200,000 and 250,000 litres of quota on offer. Our last batch of invitations went out to producers with between 275,000 and 325,000 litres.

In Scotland invitations have now gone out to producers with up to 300,000 litres. If current trends continue in Great Britain as a whole, we may eventually be able to invite producers with up to 500,000 litres to join the scheme. As we gradually work our way towards the target, full allowance is being made for applicants who are unable to decide whether to become outgoers because their special case appeals or exceptional hardship claims have not yet been finalised. Once their claims have been dealt with they will have four weeks to make up their minds one way or another.

Although the drop-out rate has been fairly high, the scheme is operating satisfactorily in Great Britain. The objective is to take up 289 million litres of milk in England and Wales, and nearly 30 million litres in Scotland. By 4 January, 1,186 producers had committed themselves to the scheme in England and Wales. In total they will surrender some 136 million litres of quota on a full year basis. In Scotland at the same time, 77 producers had committed themselves, providing a total of 12 million litres of quota in a full year.

We therefore now have 148 million litres of quota out of a planned total of 319 million litres already committed in Great Britain. Many producers still have to decide whether to proceed with their applications, and there is still a substantial number who have not yet been invited to join the scheme. There is therefore a good deal of slack to be taken up, and I believe that we shall reach our target of 319 million litres in Great Britain.

In Northern Ireland the position is less satisfactory. Indeed, 565 producers came forward offering 52·9 million litres of quota. This amounted to only four fifths of the target of 66 million litres—which of course represented 5 per cent. of the total quota rather than 2·25 per cent. as in Great Britain—and all those applicants were therefore invited to proceed. As expected, some did drop out, but by 4 January, 166 producers had committed themselves and they will surrender 10·8 million litres of quota in a full year. A further 131 have special case or exceptional hardship claims outstanding and we will not know how much quota will be available from these producers until their claims have been settled.

Thus it is difficult to say what the final position will be in Northern Ireland, but there seems likely to be a substantial shortfall in the quota made available by the scheme. That is disappointing and has obvious implications for small producers and those meeting the exceptional hardship criteria. My colleagues and I are looking to see if there are ways of dealing with the difficulties that arise from the poor response to the scheme in Northern Ireland, but we are not yet in a position to reach decisions.

The precise arrangements for re-allocation of outgoers' quota will vary somewhat between England and Wales, and Scotland and Northern Ireland in the light of local circumstances and priorities. In England and Wales, our intention is, as I have previously made clear, to help exceptional hardship cases and all producers with less than 200,000 litres of quota. In 1985-86 we expect, subject to re-examination of the figures when the outgoers scheme is completed, to be able to give exceptional hardship cases the full amount of quota determined by the tribunal.

Wholesale producers in England and Wales with less than 200,000 litres quota will, subject again to re-examination of the figures, have their quotas for 1985-86 increased by 11 per cent.—these are important figures—that is, sufficient to offset the 9 per cent. cut made in 1984-85 and the 1 per cent. cut to be made for all producers in 1985-86 in accordance with the original agreement last March.

A corresponding increase will be made in the quotas of direct sellers with under 200,000 litres. However, no producer's quota will be raised above 200,000 litres. The adjustments will be tapered to avoid anomalies for producers just above or below the 200,000-litre mark.

Any quota available in 1985-86 after meeting the needs of exceptional hardship cases and increasing the quotas of small producers may be used to help producers who are awarded development quota by the tribunal—that is, producers engaged in expansion programmes, whose awards will have been pruned back in 1984-85 to keep within the total amount of quota available. This figure will be of great interest to the House: in 1984-85 it looks at present as if the cut in those awards in England and Wales

[Mr. Jopling]

may be of the order of 35 per cent. Next year we hope to be able to reduce the cut by this use of the outgoers quota, which is spare.

Because producers who became outgoers will have used a significant part of their quotas before joining the outgoers scheme, the total amount of quota available for re-allocation in 1984-85 will be substantially less than that available for a full year. In 1984-85 we envisaged using all the quota becoming available to help exceptional hardship cases.

Obviously, the United Kingdom is not the only member state to have an outgoers scheme. All other member states, with the exception of Denmark, Greece and Luxembourg, have announced details of their own schemes. Naturally, they vary in character considerably to reflect different circumstances and different aims. For example, Germany hopes to buy 4 per cent. of national quota as against 2·25 per cent. in Great Britain. In Italy payments will be made not for quota surrendered, as in other member states including the United Kingdom, but for each dairy cow slaughtered—the aim being to reduce the size of the national dairy herd by 5 per cent.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: I must finish my speech.

The main differences between the various schemes illustrate the difficulty of drawing direct comparisons between them. For that reason, I do not think that an attempt at comparative analysis would help the House. Nevertheless, compared with other schemes, we are satisfied that our scheme is advantageous for individual producers. The French scheme, for example, offers considerably lower payments to producers than does ours.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: In his progress report on the outgoers scheme the Minister gave us statistics for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and for England and Wales together. Will he ensure that he gives us the statistics for Wales separately from those for England because his right hon. Friend bears equal ministerial responsibility to that of the agricultural Ministers for Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Jopling: I cannot do that now. I have provided a mass of statistics because I wanted to give the House the best information I had. If the hon. Gentleman cares to table questions about specific points, we shall see what we can do to help him.

Certainly, the encouraging response in Great Britain shows that the rate of payment for the surrender of quota was pitched at about the right level to provide sufficient incentives. Some other member states appear to have been less successful in attracting an adequate response from producers. Both Germany and the Netherlands have had to extend their deadlines for outgoers into this year. In Great Britain, on the other hand, the outgoers scheme closed on 28 August—well over four months ago—and we certainly do not expect there to be any shortfall in the amount of quota offered.

The outgoers scheme is going well, and I hope that hon. Members will agree that the Bill should have a smooth and rapid passage through the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) referred to the NFU documents, and hoped that the Bill would soon be enacted. The Bill is short and narrow in scope, but for all that it is extremely necessary because of the large amount of public money involved. It will benefit individual producers and the country if that money can be disbursed under the authority we seek to provide through the Bill. I have pleasure in commending the Bill to the House.

4.36 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): We welcome the opportunity for a further debate on the dairy industry. We were interested in what the Minister had to say, especially in the intriguing insight into negotiations between the Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We are always grateful for such information.

If I cannot compliment him on the contents of his speech, I can at least compliment the right hon. Gentleman on the frankness of the short title of the Bill: Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill. We get a lot of upbeat but fundamentally dishonest, short titles to Bills, but with characteristic finesse the Minister gives us a "cessation of production" Bill. There is nothing like calling a spade a shovel. No doubt we can look forward to "cessation of production" Bills for the coal and engineering industries as the Government continue their lunatic progress through the British economy.

Before I turn to the details of the Bill, I appeal to the Minister of State when he replies to say more than his right hon. Friend did about the progress, or lack of it, of the quota system throughout the European Community. That is inextricably tied up with the Bill's provisions. The outgoers scheme is an inextricable part of the quota system.

From previous debates the Government know that we regard the entire business as a dog's breakfast of expediency and incompetence. I do not know where the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) got his reputation for being a wet. First the dairy farmers and now our miners have come to know him for what he really is. It is the misfortune of this particular right hon. Michael that he has been left with the job of rowing this boat ashore. Many dairymen earnestly wish that he was doing something else.

The right hon. Gentleman and the country know that the previous Minister negotiated a lousy deal for the British dairy industry last March. He gave the industry 15 days' notice to reverse the stated objectives of successive Governments for the previous 40 years. Forty years' progress was thrown into reverse virtually overnight. He added insult to injury by selling 6·2 per cent. of our production when the overall European cut was to be only 4·1 per cent. Britain had the best case, but the Minister managed to obtain just about the worst deal. He must be condemned for that failure.

The Minister will have a final chance to redeem himself in the eyes of the industry during the 1985-86 price-fixing negotiations. He should try to ensure that the additional 1 per cent. cut in production that is due in April will not apply to Britain. That may or may not be possible, but the Minister should at least fight for it. He has given away more than enough already, and our producers have suffered more than enough already. We are entitled to demand that he should retreat no further.

The Opposition understand perfectly the need to restrain dairy production in the Community and the need to restructure the industry, but we have consistently

pointed to the fact that over-production is not a significant problem in Britain. There was no need for the Minister to make the concessions that he made last year. The Minister of State should say something more about that when he replies.

Against that background, may I ask the Minister for the clear undertaking that the British dairy industry will not be penalised for undershooting its 1984 quota? He has spoken about that in the past, but production has decreased significantly, partly because of drought during the summer, but largely due to the panic measures that were induced in the industry when the quota scheme was sprung on it last year. As a result, there could be a significant shortfall. I was alarmed to read a report in *The Scotsman* on Tuesday this week, written by its highly reputable agricultural editor, which stated:

"There are now fears that unless quotas can be met dairy farmers will face another imposed production cut this spring as part of the EEC's 1985 farm price package."

If the Minister wishes to nail that point here and now, I should be only too happy to give way to him. He has said that Britain should not be penalised for undershooting the quota this time, and doubts have been expressed again this week. I hope that at some stage we shall be reassured by a Minister, if not by the Minister himself.

The Government are motivated by many primitive fetishes, one of which is that the state should not intervene in the economy. That is probably why the Government always make a mess when they become involved in restructuring industry. In this case, the Minister has one hand on the throat of the dairy industry and the other hand across his eyes because he cannot bear to see the effects of what he is doing, and no wonder. There has been a succession of hasty decisions and rough justice, and the outgoers scheme is a case in point.

The Labour party would support a properly funded and sensibly drafted outgoers scheme. I should explain why we regard this scheme with considerable disdain and how we believe it should be altered. As the Minister said again today, the objective is supposed to be to buy in enough quota for redistribution to small producers to enable them to return to their 1983 production level. That is all very well as far as it goes, but other people need extra quota. If the Minister has any doubt about that, he should consult the members of the panels and tribunals that he set up to deal with claims for secondary quota. There are some extremely pressing cases.

As an example, let us consider the hypothetical small farmer with 50 cows who may have made plans, as he was encouraged to do until 1983, to build up his herd to 100 cows. Events overtook that hypothetical dairy farmer, and he was caught on the hop when the Government introduced the quota scheme. However, he was told that there was an opportunity to obtain secondary quota, so he presented his case to the tribunal, which had to accept it. However, the tribunal had to ignore the first 10 per cent. of the increase applied for, so it could recommend only a further 45 cows. So far, so good. That would be tolerable, but it is not the end of the story. The Government will be able to satisfy only about two thirds of the additional quota recommended by the tribunals. The Minister confirmed that fact today. The figure for Scotland, which has been finalised, is 57·5 per cent. of the additional quota which the tribunals regard as being justified.

Therefore, the hypothetical small farmer who has invested heavily in machinery, buildings and equipment for a herd of 100 cows may be allowed to milk only 80 cows. Such dairy farmers could face bankruptcy. The Minister must recognise the urgent need to obtain more quota for redistribution to such farmers. I could cite umpteen cases of disturbing examples of farmers who are not covered by the criteria laid down for special cases in the present scheme, and the Minister should be worried about that.

We must release more quota for distribution to farmers, who must be allowed to expand if the industry is to have any future. The only way to achieve that is through the outgoers scheme. The Opposition say that the scheme is cheap and nasty. It is nasty because the target of quota to be bought in for redistribution is inadequate and badly defined; it is cheap because the compensation to outgoers is inadequate. As we know, the scheme has been heavily oversubscribed.

The National Farmers Union estimates that there is a need for about 50 per cent. more quota than is covered by the present scheme. That figure may or may not be reasonable, but it appears that the quota the Minister intends to buy in is inadequate. If we need an additional 50 per cent. on top of what is already provided, that would cost an extra £25 million over five years. That is not an unduly high price for a secure future for an important industry such as the dairy industry, and it is far below the amounts provided in other countries, no matter how the Minister may try to avoid those facts.

The Minister's scheme will cost £50 million in compensation over five years. The first year of the scheme in France will cost £80 million, and a total of £200 million over three years. In Germany, the first year will cost £25 million, and the next 10 years will cost £206 million. On another basis, under the British scheme, outgoers will receive £130 a year for five years for each cow relinquished, which is a total of £650 per cow over five years. We should compare that with a possible payment of up to £940 per cow over two months under the Italian scheme. I recognise that that is an odd scheme, but it represents much money——

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The comparisons are interesting, but they do not take into account the fact that Italy, Germany and France have many more small producers.

Mr. Home Robertson: I accept that point, but what I am trying to say is that, once again, the Minister has sold short British producers. In most cases we are talking about small producers. They are the people who the Minister is encouraging to come out, so in that respect they should be treated equally.

The Labour party feels especially strongly about the fact that the scheme includes nothing for employees who will lose their jobs because of the process. Many creamery staff are being made redundant, and the Transport and General Workers Union estimates that about 250 dairy stockmen on farms will lose their livelihoods because of the scheme. There is no special compensation to help those people to make new lives. The Dutch and Danish outgoers schemes provide some compensation for dairy stockmen, and we demand that the British scheme should contain similar provisions.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): The hon. Gentleman seemed to be suggesting that anyone losing his job as a result of a farmer going out of business would be

[Mr. Nicholas Baker]

entitled to redundancy payment. Is he suggesting that the redundancy payment should be artificially high, say, similar to that offered to coal miners?

Mr. Home Robertson: There are parallels in other industries, but these are exceptional circumstances. This restructuring was introduced as a result of European Governments' policies, and there are grounds for suggesting that if the farmer receives compensation, the employees who lose their jobs should also receive some.

The Minister should consider further the consequences of the scheme for the people concerned, and for the communities where those people live and the land that they farm. The current scheme is designed to move about 80,000 cows off existing holdings, or, in other words, to take about 150,000 acres out of dairy farming. We understand that, on the whole, smaller farms will be affected.

For the sake of argument, let us say that between 1,500 and 2,000 small dairy units will disappear under the provisions of the scheme. We accept that part of the scheme may be necessary, but we would approach the problem in a different way. Let us consider again the hypothetical small farmer with 50 cows. Instead of struggling on and trying to get some additional quota, he may decide to opt for the outgoers scheme. Dairy farming will then be banned on that farm for the foreseeable future.

The pay-off for the farmer will be £6,500 a year for five years. That sum will be taxed in one way or another, and a substantial proportion of it may well be committed to the bank because of previous borrowings. The final figure of £32,500 is not very substantial. It will not be adequate for the establishment of alternative enterprises and employment in the areas affected. Most of the farms concerned will be in traditional grassland areas in the west of the country. What is the alternative land use in such areas? Beef production, which might seem to be the most obvious answer, is in surplus too. The Minister will therefore be throwing those areas into turmoil.

Some older farmers may well retire on the outgoers scheme. What will happen to their land, and the fragile rural communities in which it is situated? I fear that rural depopulation may be aggravated. I have personal experience of what that would mean, as I live in the Scottish borders, which have suffered from rural depopulation for many years. The rural areas are entitled to more civilised treatment from any Government.

The Minister may achieve his short-term objective within the constraints laid down by the Treasury. He was kind enough to tell us how such matters are arranged. However, I wonder whether he understands the consequences, and I seriously doubt whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer cares about them. We are debating the major restructuring of a major industry, which, sadly, will entail taking some land out of dairying. The Minister's policy is to buy in quota at the lowest possible price and then to wash his hands of the consequences. That is not good enough. He should be offering positive incentives and responsible guidance on alternative enterprises suitable for the former dairy units.

While considering what happens to the money paid under the outgoers scheme, I should like briefly to refer to the skullduggery engaged in by landlords in some areas. I refer the Minister to a report in *Farmers Weekly* of 21 December. Under the headline

"Rent 'blackmail' for milk outgoers",

the report states:

"In Yorkshire, complaints of blackmail are being applied to demands on tenants wishing to quit milk. The owner's signature of consent"—

that is, the landlord's signature—

"for a tenant to take the Outgoers' Scheme is being made conditional upon the tenant first agreeing to a hefty rent increase or to paying a cash sum to the landowner . . . More immoral still was the action of one landlord, working through nationally-known agents, who had not only made owner's consent conditional on agreeing a rent increase, but had insisted that the existing rental should operate for only two years, rather than the legal minimum of three years."

The Secretary of State for Scotland is not renowned for oppressing landlords, but he has at least managed to prevent that particular abuse in the case of Scottish tenant farmers. There should be similar safeguards for tenants in England and Wales. The payments are mean enough already. There is no justification for allowing landlords to get their hands on any of the money. The Minister was warned about that possibility during the debate on 18 July. He sought to sidestep the matter. The problem has now arisen, and he should tell us more about it when he replies to the debate.

We had hoped that the Minister would say more about the question of transferring quota from one farm to another. Clearly, more flexibility is needed. We have our views as to how that flexibility should be achieved, but I wish to refer in detail to two aspects of the scheme that seemed to us to be too restricted.

First, the Minister has decided to restrict the outgoers scheme to small producers, and he is taking a very long time to decide which applicants to accept. As the months go by there is tranche after tranche, and the uncertainty that afflicts the industry is prolonged.

Mr. Jopling *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister may shake his head, but many people who applied six months ago are still waiting for a response, and that is causing uncertainty.

The Minister should buy in any quota that any producer wants to relinquish, within reason, and subject to alternative enterprises being available for the holdings concerned. Such a policy would be more flexible and might encourage some bigger producers to give up dairying in areas where feasible alternative enterprises are available. In that way a significant amount of quota could be bought back under the scheme, and the quota thus made available could enable proportionately far more smaller dairy farms to stay in business. That would be better for the broad rural economy.

Secondly, I cannot see why clause 1 has to compel producers to stop milk production altogether. The Opposition agree with the submission made by the Farmers Union of Wales that partial surrenders of quota should also be covered by the scheme. Such a scheme would make it possible to encourage dairy farmers to diversify their enterprises instead of abandoning dairying altogether. I urge the Minister to consider that point further. It is one to which we shall certainly return in Committee.

The Opposition are far from impressed with what the Bill does with the outgoers scheme. Every organisation representing farming interests has expressed the view that

the scheme is pitifully inadequate. We are appalled by the way in which the Government have treated the dairy industry in the past year. Together with a number of Conservative Members, we voted against the quota regulations at the outset. The industry needs sensible restructuring. What it is getting is closer to rapid strangulation.

We do not oppose the principle of compensating outgoers, so we will not vote against Second Reading. However, we shall seek significant improvements in the Bill in Committee.

4.58 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): The most important positive aspect of my right hon. Friend's introduction of the Bill was the flexibility that there will be. As there are, of course, pressures on legislative time, the best compromise is certainly for future additions to the existing scheme to be effected by statutory instrument. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) suggested, there should be a draft laid, so that hon. Members can respond to the Minister's ideas, which will then come before the House, as in the case of the quota regulations themselves, in a form in which they can pass rapidly into law. That is the best compromise for the further development of the scheme, and there is no doubt that there is a dramatic need for further development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) is not able to be here today because of a twice postponed meeting with farmers in his constituency. He has asked me to cover points that he would have wished to raise had he been here. There is no doubt that there is special hardship for those who have invested in development at the direct encouragement of the Government agency, the agricultural development advisory service. We should not be mealy-mouthed about this. Right up until the day before quotas were introduced, officers in the Ministry for which my right hon. Friend is responsible encouraged farmers to expand and paid a grant from public funds to enable them to do so. That is the justification for putting public money into the outgoers scheme, additional to what has been announced. It is clear that the 2·5 per cent. which is being held back, and which made the total of a 9 per cent. reduction on the 1983 figure, is inadequate—as my right hon. Friend admitted—to meet the assessment made by the panels and the tribunals of those who have applied for secondary quota on grounds of development, the Government being party to the encouragement of that development.

I am glad that today, unlike his earlier appearances at the Dispatch Box, my right hon. Friend did not pretend that farmers should have foreseen what he himself did not foresee. He adopted that wholly unacceptable posture last year. We should commend such progress. I am afraid that my right hon. Friend must go back to the Treasury and say that the litreage that he has been able to buy in through the outgoers scheme—he knew what the maximum would be, because it was limited by the £50 million—is not adequate to meet the full exceptional development conditions which are set out in his own regulations.

Although the regulations provide for scaling, in acknowledging the need for this secondary quota my right hon. Friend is acknowledging the case for buying back, at public expense, enough quota to meet those needs as assessed. I cannot press him to do that too enthusiastically. He will have to do it in the end—the sooner and with the better grace, the better.

We should consider the case of other aspects of Government policy that are equally unavoidable. I am not pretending that the EEC surplus is the result of the Government's policy. Successive Governments have endeavoured to persuade the EEC to tackle this wholly visible problem long before it did. Some of us—I can say this as it is a matter of public record—called for quotas seven or eight years ago, before the massive expansion in France and Ireland, which has resulted in quotas being introduced so agonisingly for many of our small producers.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would comment on my next point. A pool was held back by the EEC for extra distribution to areas that are especially dependent on milk production. I never heard from the Dispatch Box by what formula such areas were to be recognised. Was it a matter of political pressure, or was it one of overt formula which can be tested in other areas, including the United Kingdom, to see whether they qualify as much as, for example, the Republic of Eire? Consideration of income tax to which producers are liable in the United Kingdom and the notorious absence of taxation of farmers in Southern Ireland reveals that what matters is not just net income—the difference between gross returns and gross expenditure — but post-tax income. Producers' standard of living, their ability to undertake capital development or to reduce debt, whether in southern Ireland, the United Kingdom or Luxembourg, depends on how much money they have after tax. On what formula is the held-back litreage allocated?

The outgoers scheme is rendered necessary by the quota system, so it is wholly in order on Second Reading to discuss matters without which the Bill would not have come to the Floor of the House. This is our only opportunity of a Second Reading on this matter as there will not be subsequent Bills. The implications of the Bill depend on the future of the quota system in the EEC, even after Spain and Portugal join, as they are likely to do. One of the prime reasons for present circumstances is the pressure on the EEC budget. It is highly likely, I hope, that quotas might be imposed on olive oil and wine as well. If so, it is probable that France will press for Algeria's right to send wine to the EEC not to be taken out of the French quota but to be treated as an obligation of the EEC because it has come in for many years. That has been recognised since Lomé. A similar analogy can be drawn with regard to New Zealand dairy produce. It has come to the United Kingdom for many years for reasons that are widely known. It is just as much an habitual inflow to the EEC as Algerian wine. My right hon. Friend should be working towards treating the import of milk products from New Zealand to the EEC not as a charge against the British quota. That is the best way in which to resolve the dilemma. Without such a resolution it will not be Britain but one small section of people in Britain—our dairy farmers—who will pay for New Zealand imports. A national obligation should be a Communitywide obligation. It is to that end that I would encourage him to work.

I wish to stress the strong resentment felt about the delay in the results of appeals. It is believed that there is inadequate secretarial staff on the panels and the appeal tribunals so that people have to wait eight, nine or 10

[Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

weeks for the result of appeals. It is also widely believed that although there is a common law throughout the United Kingdom, panels, often adjacent to each other, decide on widely different allocations of secondary quota although the factual bases of the cases may have been similar. This leads to considerable resentment.

I wish to draw to my right hon. Friend's attention one category of claim for secondary quota that has been dealt with parsimoniously by tribunals and panels. Where a small farmer has extended his premises with his own hands instead of employing a contractor he has not been treated well. In other words, his commitment to expansion has been out of his own resources, in some cases without the use of any Government grant. The pattern in these cases is that the panels have been conspicuously parsiminious in allocating a secondary quota although, had the physical expansion of facilities been financed even partly by Government grant and had there been bills to show from a contractor, it seems that there would have been a much greater allocation of secondary quota. I hope my right hon. Friend will agree that this is unjust.

So long as the facts are demonstrable about the expansion of equipment or buildings or the purchase of cattle, it should not be relevant to the determination of secondary quota whether the expenditure was part of an ADAS-approved scheme, or whether money was lent by a bank. Even though those may be supporting evidence, that is not the essence of whether someone was committed to expansion. There is greater hardship when a farmer has paid 100 per cent. of the cost out of his own resources than when part has been paid by grant.

As many of us knew when it was introduced, the scheme is imperfect. It will be tolerable only if my right hon. Friend and his right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales—he is not on his own in this battle—can extract from the Treasury the tiny sum of about £25 million—we are not talking about a large sum—to buy enough quota to allow the allocation of secondary quota to go through without diminution. That is the most important point that needs to be made in the debate so that the Bill can be welcomed for its ability to bring in quickly an extension of the existing scheme.

5.13 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): It is well known that, although the milk quota system has been in effect for more than nine months, the whole scheme appears still to be a complete shambles and, in the opinion of the majority of farmers, far from satisfactory. When one talks to members of the National Farmers Union, the Farmers Union of Wales, the Country Landowners Association and others involved with the industry, one finds that they are all despondent and will never forgive the Minister of Agriculture for making such a political blunder as he made last year.

There may be a lull in the protests, but this is only because of under-production due to various factors. I predict that in a year's time the position will be far worse if drastic action is not taken by the Government. As one who represents an area where the majority of dairy farmers have small or modest holdings—this is true of Wales as a whole and of many parts of Britain—I feel strongly that the Government have signally failed to protect the interests of small farmers and have stood by seemingly indifferent as the rural economy has deteriorated as a direct result of the quota system.

The Bill is unlikely to help and should be modified drastically to ensure justice to an industry that has received more than its fair share of knocks in the past year. My colleagues and I will not vote against the Second Reading because it is the wish of many people that the Bill should pass through the House with all possible speed, but unless the Government will accept amendments to the benefit of dairy producers it is more than likely that my colleagues and I will vote against Third Reading.

I understand that by mid-December only 1,060 producers had applied to go out of milk production, and of those the majority appeared to be farmers with 30 to 50 cows. As the Minister did not like what I said earlier in the debate, it would be useful if he could confirm this when he is replying and also give a breakdown of how many farmers in Wales, in Dyfed particularly and in various regions of England and Scotland have gone for this option. If the correct figures are given on the Floor of the House, we shall know whether the Government are trying to persuade small farmers to give up dairying.

Because of the provisions outlined in the Bill and the operation of the quota system in general, it is inevitable that it is the small producer who will be forced out of business while the larger farmer, because of the nature of his enterprise, will be able to carry on with just a small adjustment in production. Like many other hon. Members, I feel that it is fundamentally wrong for this discrimination against the small producer to continue. Ways should be found to alleviate the hardship that many of them face. There should be more flexibility.

As it stands, the Bill makes it a condition of the outgoers scheme that a producer must surrender his quota in its entirety if he wishes to participate in the scheme. If farmers were given the option of giving up only part of their quota there would be a much greater response from the larger producer who would be more able to diversify. This would release more quota for use by the smaller producer who is not able to diversify.

If the scheme is to be successful, the terms for outgoers should be more generous. I do not think that 13p per litre or £650 per cow is sufficiently attractive to make the scheme effective. The sums involved should in all fairness be tax free as the money would be needed immediately for investment in other agricultural ventures. It should not be treated like ordinary income or profit.

I was disappointed when the Minister did not say specifically that the money handed over to the producers would be tax free. He should consider this again, because these farmers will sell the cattle directly off the farm and will be starting a new enterprise the following day. Consequently, this will merely be passing a sum of money from an old business to a new one. That is why it should be tax free. That is food for thought for the Minister during the next few weeks while the Bill is in Committee.

It would also be helpful if at this stage, with his hand on his heart for once, the Minister could reassure agriculture that if a farmer chooses to go out of dairying and into sheep or beef production, for example, he will not be faced this time next year, or in the near future, with another quota system on those products. What guarantees can he give on that point?

Many hon. Members are aware that there are many county council smallholdings throughout the country. I

have received a letter from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) who received it from Lord Hooson. It has been written by Andrew Thomas, group secretary of the NFU in Newtown, and states:

"On behalf of our member Mr. E. J. Davies, Cefncanol, Penstrowed, Newtown I should like very much to bring to your attention his situation as regards being a tenant farmer on a County Council small holding producing milk.

Mr. Davies applied to go out of milk, wishing to take advantage of the Outgoers Scheme. Powys County Council his landlord, have stated that he cannot take advantage of this benefit and go out of milk, unless the quota to which he is entitled was to stay on one of their holdings. Please find enclosed a copy of a letter requested from Powys County Council on behalf of Mr. Davies which sets out his position.

I am sure that you have received many such letters as a result of the implementation of milk quotas, but the problems amongst Tenant Farmers are very prominent. These problems need sorting out urgently. It is a very uncomfortable, and distressing situation to have land lord set against tenant in a way such as this, and the sooner the position ends the better for all parties concerned.

Mr. Davies requests that the matter be pressed with the powers that be, until a favourable reply is forthcoming. We are sure that we can rely on your support at this time.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Thomas
Group Secretary

P.S. Mr. Davies has gone out of milk, has refused to sign a Milk Marketing Board letter in order to resign his licence, and is awaiting guidance on his position. We hope some favourable outcome will be forthcoming."

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem highlighted in that letter causes difficulties not only to tenant farmers but also to the Powys county council in the management of its substantial smallholdings estate, and that the county council as landlord in that case shares the anxiety of the tenants and feels that it cannot satisfactorily manage its estate until some provisions are made to compensate tenant farmers for coming out of milk production?

Mr. Howells: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend. We are both aware that many dairy farmers are tenants with various county councils throughout Britain. I am sure that they will read with interest the advice which the Minister will give.

We in this country have always believed in fair play and justice, and these qualities are manifestly absent from the arrangements proposed for getting rid of milk surpluses in Britain. I hope that the Minister of Agriculture, the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland, and the Minister responsible for dairy production in Northern Ireland will go to Brussels this spring and make a special plea on behalf of these farmers to ensure that we get an additional quota for small producers who are so dependent on the milk industry for their living. Following this debate, I hope that Ministers will assure us that they will have another look at the content of the Bill and will do what they can to improve it in order to ensure that British dairy producers are well looked after in the future. They deserve that, because they have had a very rough treatment during the last 12 months by this Government.

5.26 pm

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): I entirely agree with the appeal of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) that there should be flexibility in the application of the quota scheme. That is what the debate is all about, even though it is secondary to the fact that we are generally agreed that the Bill should be given a Second Reading. In that respect, I welcome the measure.

By way of introduction, I hope that my few brief remarks will be considered as an intervention rather than a speech, in the pious hope that as a result it will not be counted against my quota of speeches in Mr. Speaker's computer.

All of us, perhaps, have major reservations about the quota system. It was introduced at the worst possible time of year and with the most regrettable suddenness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) has already pointed out, it was also introduced at a time when ADAS, as the organ of the Ministry of Agriculture, was encouraging milk production. Even so, and in the realisation that in saying this the wrath of God if not the NFU might be brought down on my head, it is a miracle that the introduction of the scheme has been so relatively smooth in such a short time.

All of us representing large numbers of dairy farmers were inundated with letters to start with. My response to most of them was, "I appreciate all the problems and difficulties with which you are faced, but let us give it a little time for the system to settle down. After all, it works in some other parts of the world, and there is no reason why it should not work here."

Broadly speaking, the system is beginning to settle down, and we must now look to the future and try to smooth off some of the rough edges. It must be evolved sensibly and realistically so that the disadvantages that exist are tackled in the best possible way in the interests of farmers, and small farmers in particular.

I strongly support the NFU's plea that changes in the system should be introduced to enable an interchange between wholesale and direct sale quotas. Several of my constituents are deeply concerned about this. I know that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues are sympathetic, but I hope that somehow they can twist the arms of their ministerial colleagues in the Council of Ministers and obtain some concessions. Presumably this must be of some advantage to European farmers just as much as to our own.

Secondly, there is the question of the transfer of quotas and also the question of the relative importance of the interests of the tenant farmer and the landlord. The National Farmers Union has said that it is vital that quotas should be vested in the producer and should be made saleable on conditions which would include the reasonable protection of the landlord's interests. I agree entirely with that. Quite unwittingly, it is, unfortunately, a fact that the balance of advantage lies with the landlord. I say that in no critical spirit; it is just how it has worked out.

I agree strongly with the Minister that the president of the Country Landowners Association has spoken with maximum responsibility about trying to ensure that his members are as objective as they can be in responding to requests by tenant farmers that they should be allowed to join the outgoers scheme. Nevertheless, as one tenant farmer of the Ministry of Defence in my constituency pointed out, at present the tenant under the system is worse off and the landlord inadvertently is better off, since the quota system enhances the value of a let dairy, not only as of now but looking to the future, should a tenant farmer retire and a collection of potential new tenants tender for that farm. Therefore it is important that the balance should

[Mr. Charles Morrison]

be redressed, hopefully as a result of agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the one hand and the NFU and the CLA on the other.

My next point is that there is some criticism of the rules and operations of the tribunals. A number of my constituents have complained to me about this aspect of the scheme. One point which was drawn to my attention by one tenant farmer was that the tribunal before which he appeared apparently always based its judgment on numbers of cows rather than on the efficiency of the producer. The farmer who came to see me said that he had invested a considerable amount of money in modernising his dairy with the intention partly of increasing the number of cows in his dairy—he was quite prepared to accept that he would not be allowed to do that—but mostly with the intention of increasing the efficiency of output of his existing herd. He claimed that that point was not fully taken account of by the tribunal before which he appeared.

Another farmer grumbled justifiably about the delays in obtaining decisions from the tribunal. In a letter which he wrote to me recently he said:

"The quota scheme came into operation on April 2nd last year. It would seem that I have to wait patiently for nearly ten months before I can have any indication of the parameters upon which I have to plan my business in future. Even then I shall have to wait at least another month before I can even hazard a guess as to the possible cutback in any secondary quota award. Such treatment is quite unacceptable".

I think that we would all sympathise with the point he is making. I realise the difficulties, but what he has done is to emphasise the need for speed in drawing these matters to a conclusion.

Finally, I make a strong plea for the interests of new entrants into farming to be taken fully into account. Many new farmers, whether owner-occupiers or tenants, go into farms which, for one reason or another, are not in good order. Perhaps they have been run down because the previous farmer was getting old and was not quite so enthusiastic as he had been in his younger days. Account has to be taken of considerations of that kind. Therefore I hope it will be possible to give special consideration to new entrants.

In other words, I am emphasising the need for flexibility, common sense and a steady evolution of the scheme. I believe that it is beginning to work reasonably well. I think that, as time goes on, it can work much better. Such a system works perfectly satisfactorily in other parts of the world. I hope that we shall learn from others. I have great confidence that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department will ensure that the scheme continues to make progress.

5.35 pm

Mr. James Nicholson (Newry and Armagh): I should like to refer to that part of the Bill which relates to Northern Ireland. As the Minister said, Northern Ireland legislation will go through by Order in Council but will follow fairly closely the Bill which is before us today. As other hon. Members have said, the Bill is a bad Bill. It does not go far enough. I agree with previous hon. Members who said that the Bill does not do sufficient to entice farmers to go out of milk production. There is no tax allowance. If a farmer turns from one part of the industry to another part of the industry, consideration ought to be given to that fact.

May I also draw attention to the serious lack of attendance at this debate by Ministers from the Northern Ireland Office. This is not the first time when a major debate has taken place that not one Minister has appeared on the Government Front Bench to represent Northern Ireland agriculture or to hear what is to be said. This happens continuously. On behalf of those whom I represent and on behalf of all those whom the Ulster Unionist party represents I have to say that we find this deplorable and disgraceful. Especially on a day when Northern Ireland questions have been asked and Ministers are here, it is deplorable that they cannot make time to attend this important debate. It is small wonder that Northern Ireland agriculture is in the position it finds itself in today if Ministers cannot make time to come to listen to this important debate on the most important industry in Northern Ireland.

I should much prefer it if measures such as the outgoers scheme were not necessary. We are putting small farmers out of business. Many of them do not wish to go out of business but they see no alternative. In the longer term this can only have a damaging effect on the industry. Small farmers in Northern Ireland are the backbone of the agricultural industry. Many of them, as I hope to demonstrate, have no alternative. This is to the detriment of dairy farmers in Northern Ireland. Some of these small producers, who are making a living by producing milk from 16 or 25 cows, find that those cows are more important to them than the 200 cows belonging to another farmer. From that point of view the scheme is very important to the small farmer in Northern Ireland.

When the Minister of State addressed the House on 3 July 1984 he said that he proposed to buy up 5 per cent. of the total quota in Northern Ireland because of the large proportion of small producers there. In his reply he said:

"We have adopted this approach because we recognise the special problems of Northern Ireland, which include an especially high number of small producers. That is why we have given it favourable terms under the outgoers' scheme." — [*Official Report*, 3 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 235.]

I do not for one moment doubt the sincerity with which those statements were made, but with hindsight, as the Minister has recognised today, we can say that the scheme never got off the ground in Northern Ireland. It has been a disaster there.

The Department of Agriculture received offers in the region of 4 per cent. of total production and to date has only had firm offers in the region of 10 million litres—one sixth of what the Minister proposed to buy out. Placed against the Minister's original intention to purchase 66 million litres in Northern Ireland, that 10 million litres pales into insignificance.

The Minister recognised today and in earlier debates the importance of the scheme to Northern Ireland dairy production and dairy farmers, especially the small farmers. What proposals has he to rectify the position? Will he assure the House tonight that no farmer in Northern Ireland will be placed at a disadvantage by the scheme's failure?

No doubt many would ask why there was not the same enthusiasm for the outgoers scheme in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the United Kingdom. The main reason, as I outlined earlier, is that the dependence of the small farmer for his livelihood on milk production with no alternative to turn to means that he had to have second, and indeed third, thoughts about even considering entering the

scheme. The fact that the present uptake has been only 10 million litres and that few farmers are likely to come forward in the next few months as they receive their results from the tribunals, shows that they will, if at all possible, try to continue and do their best. Farmers felt that they had no alternative. The will to survive will have to remain with them as they get the results in future.

Most will agree that the famers placed in the worst position of all in Northern Ireland — perhaps in the United Kingdom it would be different—are those with fewer than 40 cows or 200,000 litres. In many instances they were not expanding. They did not contribute in any way to the surplus. The vast majority of them had the same herd size five or six years ago. Consequently, they received no allocation of secondary quota from expansion. It has also been extremely difficult to achieve anything for them under the hardship scheme.

Those with 16 to 25 cows have come out worst of all. For such a farmer the loss of one cow in any given 12 months will hit his income hard. But a farmer with 100 or more cows who loses 10 can sustain that loss. That is why I am most angered about the position of the small farmer in my area.

On 3 July and again today the Minister said:

"We shall be aiming specifically to make extra quota available to dairy farmers who produce less than 200,000 litres annually".—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. 168.]

Broadly speaking, that is what I have been referring to in my remarks.

I could support that proposal and I have no doubt that my colleagues could too. It would effectively restore the small farmer to the 1983 production level. Will the Minister exercise equality for all and extend the proposal throughout the United Kingdom because it has great merit? If it were extended to Northern Ireland it would go part of the way to solving many of the problems of many of our small farmers.

This afternoon, the Minister said that he hoped to bring farmers in England and Wales in the region of over 200,000 litres up to the 1983 production level. For Scotland he referred to figures—I stand to be corrected —in the region of 250,000 litres. Northern Ireland is entitled to the same consideration and to the same proposal. I hope that when the Minister replies he will deal with that point.

I want to take this opportunity to assure the Minister that I do not propose to refer to the long-debated 65,000 tonnes which we never received in the first place. But that does not mean for one moment that we accept the situation or agree with the explanations which have been given. The issue is still at the forefront of our minds. Instead, I want to deal with the buy-out scheme in particular.

The main effect of quotas is when they fall on the shoulders of those who may be forced to pay levy at the end of the time. To the best of my knowledge Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom at present where levy is due. It is hard to get up-to-date figures because of the holiday but the best figure that is available is for the first six months where collection is due. At that stage farmers were due to pay over £5 million in levies in Northern Ireland. Agriculture in Northern Ireland in the present climate, certainly dairy producers, cannot afford that sort of figure. It is bad enough to have to pay the co-responsibility levy, which should not have been imposed in the first place and is no longer achieving what it was brought in for, but it is even worse to have to pay the levy. Unfortunately, some farmers are beginning to come to the conclusion that it will disappear. Let me make it clear —I hope that the Minister will do so when he replies— that it will not disappear and farmers will eventually have to pay that levy at whatever level is finally worked out.

I have attended a fair number of tribunals and panels while representing my constituents over the past couple of months. Some farmers are in an unfortunate position. There are those who, under the regulations, do not qualify for claims for development, hardship or epizootic disease. To coin an old phrase, they have fallen between two stools. Everyone recognises that they should receive something, but there is nothing. There is no way under the regulations by which they can receive any consideration for quota at all. They are mainly the medium size farmers with between 50 and 80 cows in a herd. They are the farmers who appear to be hit hardest.

As has been said, no Government have the right to put a farmer, who has to change within 15 days or even one day, out of business, and certainly the EEC has no right to do that.

I implore the Minister to give further serious consideration to the plight of Northern Ireland's small dairy farmers and to introduce new sound proposals which will enable us to tell our farming constituents that this House recognises their difficulties and is reacting accordingly.

5.51 pm

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on an important subject. I welcome the Bill because the outgoers scheme was announced in reply to a letter from, and parliamentary question tabled by, me.

As my right hon. Friend said at the outset of his remarks, the scheme has been introduced because of the category of small farmers whose land can be used for nothing but dairy farming. Faced with the dramatic cut imposed on them by the quota scheme, some of them, perhaps because of the stage they have reached in their farming careers, have no alternative but to get out, and it is right that the Community should have a scheme to help them leave agricultural production.

Still well to the fore in the minds of all hon. Members who represent areas with a heavy concentration of dairy farmers is the suddenness with which the scheme was introduced and the shock that it presented to dairy farmers, not to mention the difficulties they encountered in trying to plan their businesses following that shock. However, I do not share many of the criticisms that have been directed —particularly from the Labour Front Bench, although there was an element of tongue-in-cheek in some of those criticisms—at my right hon. Friend.

I direct my criticism at the Council of Ministers, at the EEC, because I have great sympathy for a dairy farming constituent who wrote to me during this dramatic time saying, in effect, "I read the writing on the wall. Some years ago I realised that such a scheme would have to be imposed because I, like my dairy farming colleagues, recognised that we could not continue, as members of the EEC, indefinitely over-producing. I have not pushed up my production and I hope that you will not introduce a scheme that will help bail out those who have done so." I have sympathy with his foresight, but we also have a responsibility to those who were directed to increase production under some of the development schemes.

[Mr. Nicholas Baker]

Any institution such as the EEC which is responsible for running an industry such as dairying and which gives those working in that industry so little time to prepare for change — change introduced in a sudden, almost retrospective, way—leads one to question the viability of that institution. If the CAP cannot be changed in a more business-like, gradual and farsighted way, we are right to question the institution. People who run businesses must be able to plan their future in a better way than dairy farmers have been able to do.

We must consider the effect of such sudden change not only on dairy farmers but on ancillary industries. Some of the most heart-rending cries to which I have listened have come from those engaged, for example, in drainage and dredging, industries that help with the clay soil of Dorset, which is suitable for few other forms of agricultural production.

I had hoped that a way would be found to resolve the problem of the quota belonging to the landlord and therefore remaining with the land. I hope that the Government will continue to devote to this the attention that they were devoting last autumn to securing agreement between representatives of landlords and tenants so that the quota can be transferred from one genuine producer to another. That is particularly relevant to tenants of county council farms, where it should be easier to arrange such a compromise.

Reference has been made to the difficult position faced by those who raised their production under one of the development schemes, who have been, in a preliminary way, entitled to secondary quota but who have been told that that quota must be cut. I hope that my right hon. Friend will see what he can do to help people in that position, particularly those who, as part of raising their production, have changed their breed of cows. There seems to be no provision for farmers who have changed from one breed to another, yet that category of farmer is being unfairly treated.

I support what has been said about the interchange between wholesale and direct sale quotas. I appreciate that in other EEC countries this alleviation of the scheme might be abused more than would be the case here, but that problem should not be incapable of resolution and I hope that my right hon. Friend will find a way of dealing with the matter.

May we be told what other EEC countries are doing and how far they have progressed in implementing their schemes? United Kingdom dairy farmers are watching how their counterparts are applying the schemes in their countries. If they are not implementing them adequately, we shall have to revise the way in which we look at the whole issue.

I consider the Bill to be an essential element in making the quota scheme fair and tolerable and in helping those who leave dairy farming, and for that reason I wish the measure a speedy passage.

5.58 pm

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): I take issue with the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) on only one point. He was critical of the way in which milk quotas had been introduced by the European Community and suggested, in effect, that we should consider the whole decision-making process of implementing measures of this kind.

To be fair to the EEC, one sees from examining the documents that the Commission must be given credit for saying that a quota system would have to be introduced some time before it was implemented by the British Government. Our Government, in splendid isolation at one time, argued that the whole matter could be resolved by the price of milk. The result was the the British Government had to make the change overnight, whereas the European Community had recognised that a measure such as this would have to be introduced. It is worth getting on the record exactly who made the overnight change. It was not the European Community but our Government.

This Bill is of a type I have seen all too frequently in my years here—one against which one would love to vote but cannot do so. It offers far too little to the dairy farmers, but to vote against it would be to give them nothing. Being a good, sensible west country man, given the choice between very little and nothing, it would not take me long to make up my mind which of the options I would prefer. However, while I am willing to go along with the Bill, it still gives cause for much dissatisfaction.

If I had to describe the Bill in a few lines, I would describe it as a Bill to buy out small producers to help to satisfy other small producers. The net result in our dairy producing areas will be fewer small milk producers. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and my other colleagues on the Liberal Bench take the view that this Bill is anti the small farmer. In the end, he will be annihilated and will be made an even rarer part of our mixed economy when those of us who live in the country know just how important he is. The Government could have dealt with the matter differently if they had so chosen.

There is no point in rehearsing the economic effects on rural areas. If I wanted to select 20 or 30 hon. Members who knew and understood the effect of such measures on the rural areas, I would select the 30 hon. Members who are in the Chamber now. Sometimes I wish that I could press a button to move out all the hon. Members who are here and bring in the ones who are not interested enough to come to listen to the debate, because they are the ones we have to convince of the logic of the argument. I fear that the problems in the industry have only just started.

One of the most unfortunate parts of the Bill, and the regulations that go with it, is the Government's decision on the relevant merits of the tenant and the landlord. I am aware that there are just about as many relationships between tenants and landlords as there are tenants and landlords. In some cases, the landlord has built the cowhouse, invested the capital and ensured that the farm is efficient, and should have control over the quota. However, the Government have not said that they will recognise the landlord's position in that case, but have legislated on the basis that in every tenant-landlord relationship it is always the landlord who has invested the money to build up the farm.

The legislation automatically gives an absolute veto to the landlord regardless of the circumstances and the use of the outgoers scheme. There is no logic in that, and I suspect that it is a political reflection of who really has power in the Government. Given an argument between the Country Landowners Association and the National

Farmers Union, it is hard luck on the NFU. The Government come down on the side of their friends and the powerful, not of the weak. The Government should have given the presumption — not the veto — to the tenant so that the landlord could have taken his case on appeal to argue it out and if he had made the capital investment he should have control over the quota.

I shall use this opportunity — I think that I am just within the bounds of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker — to draw the Minister's attention to a tragedy in my constituency, which is based on a misunderstanding and which worries me a great deal. It concerns direct sellers. If anything in this legislation is genuinely unsatisfactory, it is the way in which direct sellers have been treated. One of the great enterprises in my county is selling Cornish cream. I was brought up on what is known in Cornwall as thunder and lightning. For those who are not initiated in the delights of this dietary lack of control, I explain that one takes a nice piece of bread and generously spreads across it some Cornish cream until the bread is no longer porous. One then spreads a nice lot of treacle over the top. If ever any hon. Member wants to put on weight, there is nothing in the world to beat thunder and lightning.

The selling of Cornish cream is a great enterprise and many people have set up substantial mail delivery systems. Over Christmas a lot of Cornish cream is sold over the counter. However, it is sad that in Cornwall there are many examples of people selling Cornish cream direct who did not appear to realise that the crux is whether they are over quota on direct sales and not whether they are over quota altogether. A number of farmers in my constituency have been successful this Christmas in selling Cornish cream and have now discovered that they are wildly over quota on direct sales and are therefore likely to be penalised quite seriously.

The confusion has arisen as a result of rumours. I read articles in *The Economist* and other magazines and have raised the matter myself. The rumours were to the effect that, although a farmer may be over quota this year, because of the drought and the initial reaction to this legislation, Britain was under quota and therefore there was no likelihood of any farmers paying any levy. Therefore, it was thought that that would apply to those selling their product direct. I hope that the Minister will clarify this matter, because I fear that the farmers in my constituency who thought that are wrong and could end up paying for large quotas. I shall draw the attention of the Minister to one or two cases where farmers are in danger of going bankrupt and, given the vagaries of the mail, send him some information.

The lunacy is that if the farmer who is in real danger of going to the wall had merely taken his milk down to the dairy he would be under quota and so in no difficulty. However, because he had the initiative to build up a clientele that would buy his milk—albeit in the form of cream — and to post it off to the customers and to collect the money, he is likely to be fined. Between now and the day that the levy is to be collected, the House and the European Community must be made to realise that that is mad, and that something needs to be done. I give the Minister early warning that a number of these cases will be brought to his attention. I hope that something can be done to relieve such difficulties.

Some interesting questions were put to the Minister about the outgoers scheme and the attitude that he showed in replying to those questions was more revealing than the replies. There is no point in having the appeals procedure — with the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours spent on it — to allocate a number of farmers extra milk but then in the final analysis to tell them that, although they have won the allocation, they still cannot produce that milk. That is manifestly lunatic. We do not have the final figures, so we do not quite know, but if in the end a further quota has been allocated but is not available because there is not enough of the outgoers scheme, the Minister must go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to get some more money to expand the scheme. To do anything else would be lunacy of the type with which the House is not normally associated. The milk can and must be allocated through the outgoers scheme, and the Government should provide the money.

I recognise that the Minister has some difficulty in getting money out of the Chancellor, but he need only present the House with the opportunity to make a decision on this matter. If the Minister allowed us to vote on whether we want another £10 million or £25 million — the amount is no larger than that — to alleviate this problem, I believe that hon. Members would go through the Lobby to support that provision. If we are given only one of these ghastly negative orders, to which we have become so accustomed over the years, we would have to vote for either a little or nothing and would not be able to give the Minister the backing he needs to go to the Chancellor. I look for an assurance that, if the figures do not match, an attempt will be made to persuade the Chancellor to produce the pennies required.

My point about tribunals is made more on the basis of my role as a representative politician than anything else. There is a number of dairy farmers in my constituency. I have to tell a dairy farmer who explains his case at some length to me that there is no point in me, as his elected Member of Parliament, taking that case to the House and trying to convince the Minister that the tribunal has made a mistake. The Minister has so tied up the regulations that the tribunal is free to act. Even if one could convince the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that, for instance, Harry Bloggs at Rosudgeon was unfairly treated, the Minister has so tied up the regulations in this quango — such is the Government's enthusiasm to transfer the power to make decisions from the elected representatives to appointed quangos — that my constituent could not win his case. That is a denial of the purpose of the Bill and of democracy. The Minister has made it impossible for us to argue our case because of the way in which he has tied up the regulations. That is as outrageous a part of the legislation as any other. I suspect that that is something with which the Minister will have to deal repeatedly.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) referred to the co-responsibility levy. I remember reading the reasons given for introducing this levy. I cannot say that I was ever enthusiastic about the levy, and I no longer see any reason for it. There is a quota regime throughout Europe. I am not especially against the quota regime for solving this horrible problem which should not have grown so large. All the reasons given five or six years ago for introducing the co-responsibility levy have now vanished, yet the levy is still collected. Why? Where is the money going?

I look to the Minister to campaign within the European Community for the scrapping forthwith of the levy. That is one of the few steps that can be taken to give the farmers a real increase during the next three years in the value of

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their production. If that is not done, there will be an immense and continuous argument in the House about the full impact of the three-year freeze. Why is the co-responsibility levy collected? Is the Minister trying to get rid of it?

6.14 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not go on about thunder and lightning — perhaps we could settle for a little fine drizzle instead. My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) suggested that it was a miracle that the levy system had got off the ground. It would be churlish if we did not pay some tribute to the tenacity of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for getting it off the ground. It would be wrong not to be frank about the fact that my right hon. Friend has benefited from a certain amount of divine intervention in getting his miracle off the ground in the shape of the weather. I am slightly worried that we may be developing a false sense of security. Who knows what the weather will be like next year and the year after? That point is often made to me by my constituents.

My right hon. Friend was against the levies because of the inflexibility they imposed upon production. The keynote of this debate has often been the need for flexibility. Flexibility is needed in three respects. First —I join hon. Members on both sides of the House— there should be flexibility with small farmers. I am in favour of the outgoers scheme which provides a type of flexibility. We are asking small farmers to go out of business to encourage other small farmers to stay in business, and that is a paradox. A number of my constituents have said to me that it would be more sensible to raise the threshold to encourage farmers with 60 or 80 cows and who can put their land to alternative use, to go out of business, thereby enabling a number of smaller farmers to stay in business. We should not forget that it is the small farmers who do not have an alternative use to which they can put their land because such acreages do not provide viable alternatives.

Secondly, I should encourage my right hon. Friend to continue to do all he can in Brussels to obtain elbow room on transferability of quota, because that is an important element of the flexibility for which we are looking. Thirdly, I believe that my right hon. Friend should not discard the possibility of being slightly more flexible in dealing with his colleagues in Europe. Because we have this scheme—no one has suggested any other scheme that will work—we must ensure that it operates fairly and quickly. We must not be lulled into a false sense of security because of the way in which matters have gone this year. Although we are right to tell our colleagues in Europe that we will not collect the levy until they sort themselves out, we should be careful about the way in which we play our hand in future, especially when we consider that, for example, the French owe 35 million ecu and we theoretically owe 2·9 million ecu. We do not want to be used by the French as a justification for their not paying that large sum. The object of the exercise is to get them to pay and not to bring down the whole levy system. No one has anything to put in this system's place.

A small farmer, who does not have a battery of secretaries but whose wife acts as secretary, may come into my surgery and spread out before me many incomprehensible documents. He seems to understand them better than I do, being more intelligent than I am. It is extremely difficult to grapple with these documents. I beg my right hon. Friend to do everything he can in the cause of simplicity. No doubt my right hon. Friend remembers what was said by Helmut Schmidt about monetary compensation. He said that only two people in the world understood how monetary compensation amounts work—one was Helmut Schmidt and the other was the deputy governor of the Hungarian national bank. It would be a pity, given that we have no alternative but to implement quotas, for the quotas to be in danger of collapsing under the weight of bureaucracy.

6.19 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am happy to take part in the debate so soon after my colleague from Cornwall, the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon). The hon. Gentleman was right to concentrate on aspects which especially affect our county, particularly the subject of Cornish cream on which I have corresponded with my right hon. Friend the Minister who, I believe, must do something to alleviate the problem.

I take issue, however, with the suggestion by the hon. Member for Truro that the Bill was somehow anti small farmers. I believe that that is quite wrong. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have indulged in one of his famous rants, as he describes them, if things had been the other way round. If those with first call on the outgoers scheme had been the larger farmers I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have put up a great show of wrath, fury and indignation and convinced the entire House that small farmers should have first call on the scheme if they wished to use it. Therefore, I believe that the Government's approach is right in that respect.

Mr. Penhaligon: I believe that the Government should have skewed the original reductions in production against the big farmers, thus putting the load on the top and saving a strong small farmers' community, if not for all time at least for the foreseeable future. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman himself would agree with that.

Mr. Harris: I do indeed. It is no secret that the hon. Gentleman and I, with others Members from Cornwall, had a most interesting and informative meeting with NFU representatives from our county. I understand, too, that Cornwall was by far the best represented county in the delegation that lobbied the House today, showing the importance of this matter to our county. I venture to suggest, however, that if the hon. Member for Truro had expressed the same view at that meeting the NFU would have been split all ways. Although he and I agree with such an approach, I suspect that the farming community as a whole would have been far from unanimous. That is the reality of the situation.

I therefore sympathise with my right hon. Friend the Minister, who was unfortunate enough to have been left holding the parcel when the music stopped. As he is no longer present, I should also say that I believe that there has been a great deal of unfair criticism of him. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) has said, the real culprit is not the Minister or the Commission but the Council of Ministers, of which my right hon. Friend is just one member. Successive British Ministers

and the Commission have urged the Council of Ministers to face this problem. Had the Council of Ministers done so, the whole business of restraining output could have been carried out in a sane, sensible way without all the aggravation and the awful uncertainty which have made the past year the most dreadful year for agriculture since the war.

Our collective job now is to try to get some sanity back into the situation. I believe that we shall have to live with quotas for a very long time. That makes it all the more important to try to sort out some of the nonsense in the present scheme. In this respect, the House owes a great debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) who first drew attention to the vexed question of tenant and landlord. As many hon. Members have said, the Government must give further thought to this. Again, of course, it is to some extent in the hands of the Community. Here, too, the hon. Member for Truro was not quite right, as the original regulation on which the scheme is based makes it clear that the quotas must be invested in the land. I believe that we must change that. I agree with the hon. Member for Truro that we must ensure greater flexibility and a much fairer system, certainly in the south-west, although I gather from speeches so far that the relationship between tenant and landlord is a major source of concern in many other parts of the country.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to answer the following question. When will the Government be in a position to redistribute to small farmers the quota made available as a result of the outgoers scheme? When can those small farmers be certain that their production levels will be restored? They are entitled to an assurance on that. After such a traumatic year, there is an urgent need to restore confidence in agriculture and especially in the dairy sector.

In this context, I echo the plea of so many hon. Members for the immediate abolition of the co-responsibility levy. When I tackled my right hon. Friend the Minister on this some weeks ago I was somewhat disappointed, as he gave the impression that, although he would press for a reduction in the levy, he would not—for reasons that I did not understand—press for its complete abolition. The hon. Member for Truro asked why the levy was still in place. It is because the Community looks to the levy as a source of funds for its hard-pressed budget. That is absolutely wrong and we have a duty to see that the levy is scrapped as quickly as possible. If my hon. Friend the Minister of State can assure us today that that will be one of the Government's aims in the next round of negotiations, he will do much to restore confidence in the farming industry.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill, although I do not believe that it goes far enough. I believe that more must be done and I add my voice to those who have pressed my right hon. Friend the Minister to go to the Chancellor for more money. My right hon. Friend said that the Bill involved considerable amounts of public money. With respect, that is absolute nonsense. We are talking about £50 million spread over five years and we are dealing with the future of a vital industry. I believe that for a comparatively small sum of money we could make the scheme really work. That is what we must set out to achieve.

6.28 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am glad to be able to contribute briefly to this important little debate on a mopping-up Bill designed to straighten out the existing situation.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on their alacrity in getting the outgoers scheme under way, providing an important anchor of confidence for the industry at a time of turmoil, anguish and anxiety. The fact that the scheme was announced so quickly and was adequately financed, at least for the first stage, was most reassuring.

As the amount of money involved is sometimes described as very little, it is worth putting the matter in context. It is nice to know that the Ministry provided the second most generous scheme within the Community because, if I read the *AGRA Europe* publication of 29 June 1984 accurately, France is the highest contributor in this respect with a support of £88 million, we come second with a support of £50 million and Germany, which is sometimes vaunted as showing a more generous response to this problem, comes in a poor third with £25 million. I think the response to that German scheme indicates its lack of acceptability.

Much has been said in the debate about flexibility. In the context of quota and the outgoers scheme, flexibility is the key. To maintain flexibility somehow or other within the rigid framework of the overall quota is the fundamental problem that has to be dealt with and resolved. In that structure, I am glad that it has been clearly enunciated by my right hon. Friend that protection of the smaller producer is the most important consideration. I have given much thought to how it might be better undertaken, but I think that the smaller producer on balance has been protected best. Those on the level of 40 cows or below wishing to stay in have been given, or will be given, the bias of support while those on the 40-cow level who are seeking to go out will also be given the balance of preference because of the lack of viability of their particular holding or circumstances.

Another point that has not been made so far in the debate concerning the small producer relates to the movement of quota. Many requests have been made for more flexibility, for a greater ability for quota to move. The National Farmers Union has made a specific request for the saleability of quota, subject to certain safeguards. This worries me. The decision to attach quota to the land seems to me to protect the smaller producer against the depredations of the larger producer, who would have the resources to buy in quota if it were freely available on the market. Therefore, to link quota to the land gives the best possible defence to the smaller producer and ensures that it is not possible for quota to accumulate in the hands of a few large producers.

One or two problems have to be accepted as a consequence. There has been considerable mention of the question of tenancies. I note the point made by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) and by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), but I think that the answer lies the other way round. If it can be shown that the tenant has made the investment in the dairy, he should have the right of appeal against the landlord rather than the other way round. That secures the fundamental position of the quota being linked to the land. The right way round to tackle the flexibility of quota seems to me

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to be in terms of leasing. I wonder whether the Minister, in winding up, can give the House some indication of what thought has been given to the development of the concept of leasing of quota on an unsecured basis so that it can return to the land when the circumstances indicate that it should do so. That would give the necessary flexibility, put the proper value on quota and thus satisfy all the requirements.

As a final point on flexibility, the hon. Member for Truro gave the most graphic description of the absurdities that will come about as a result of the inflexibility between wholesale quota and direct sales quota. In my view it is vital that this problem be resolved. We cannot have a situation in which successful sales are penalised; they must be recognised and encouraged. Successful sales mean consumption which has to be set against the present difficult market scene.

My penultimate point relates to what I referred to last May as the knock-on effect. I bear very much in mind the fact that I come from a beef-producing as well as a dairy-producing part of the world. In terms of substitution, the development of the beef herd is obviously important as, indeed, will be the lower production of commercial beef resulting from the dairy herd. It is essential that there be full maintenance of the confidence in that sector of the market for the foreseeable future. I must underline the importance of sustaining the variable beef premium scheme because, as I have said before, the variable beef premium scheme puts beef on plates, and it gets beef down throats and eaten, which cannot be bad, and it also provides the confidence that is necessary to ensure the future of the beef industry at a time when it particularly needs it.

As to the future, my right hon. Friend said that at present no further schemes are planned. When this scheme is completed and all the quotas have been allocated, will he undertake a formal review? I am sure that every other commentator, magazine and, indeed, official body will be carrying out the same exercise, but it would be helpful if the Minister would undertake a full review of the point we have reached to establish whether it is appropriate to consider taking in a further scheme. If he does bring in a further scheme, may I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) when he intervened in the early stages of the debate to ask that the regulations be brought forward in draft form so that they can be considered and possibly amended in the light of debate in the House? The value of that process was heavily underlined at the start of this whole wretched exercise when the milk quota regulations in my view were far more suitable and enhanced in quality as a consequence of such a process. I look forward to that and to the satisfactory and speedy passage of the Bill so that the situation can be properly formalised.

6.36 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I have listened with great interest to a debate during which the Benches of the official Opposition have been empty. I am not surprised. Her Majesty's Government are doing all the Opposition's work for them. They believe in quota controls and all the apparatus of the State, which we are now imposing on one of the last efficient industries in the country, the agriculture industry. I love the fascinating way in which hon. Members who have not been in the House very long today criticise my comments because by their non-attendance they are bringing about the destruction of the industry. Our farmers have the capacity to feed the hungry not only of this nation but of other parts of the world. I am saddened that, in the debate, hon. Members have shown gloom, some despondency and some petty self-congratulation while none of them have queried the fact that in the House we are attempting to go back to a situation, that I thought we left many years ago, in which this Government—and I am ashamed because it is the Government whom I generally support—revert to this terrible system of control upon control.

What do quotas mean? They mean things that are fixed from a paper basis; they mean inflexibility. Of course one can always appeal to a tribunal, which means more tribunals. What do they penalise? They penalise the efficient. Who else do they penalise? They penalise those who wish to grow, to expand, to bring their families into the business to make that growth. What do they encourage? Bureaucracy, of course; form-filling, of course—indeed, much form-filling by farmers who are far better at growing food. The bureaucracy that we are grafting on—for want of a better agricultural word—is one that I find totally unacceptable and, frankly, shameful.

It is quite easy for us to say that we can do nothing and tonight we shall have no vote. All right, there is no vote against this concept because we say that the concept is accepted and we are part of a club. The Government, of course, will not vote against it and the Opposition do not wish to vote against it. Even the Liberal party, which has been present in some profusion, will not vote against it. So we accept, and what do our farmers do? They have to accept it, because we have made the ruling. We, here at Westminster, and they, down the line, will bear the consequences. The consequences are easy to see. We are surrounded by empty green benches. Soon in Devonshire and North Devon I shall be surrounded by empty green fields because this form of system always supports those who are big enough to have an accountant and to employ a surveyor and who do not have to have the lady of the house do the paperwork. We shall empty our countryside, just as we have emptied other parts of the country. We have pretty well destroyed our manufacturing industry. Everybody will tell me that this is in the cause of greater efficiency—greater Japanese or German efficiency.

So we are now set fair to destroy perhaps the last really superb working part of Britain—the small green-field farm plus, of course, farmer and family. As they are destroyed, so the village, and with it, the village school and pub, are destroyed. In my part of the world more people live off agriculture than practise it. It is not just the farmer or the rapidly disappearing farm worker who is affected, but the man who services the tractor or who sells it, or perhaps the man who sells the car, or the concentrate. It is the professional advisers who are affected. In the small towns in areas such as Devonshire we are sentencing them all, not to a lingering death, but to a fairly quick one.

The big man can, of course, improvise and move into other areas. A big farm is usually fairly flexible and has the advisers and adaptability. But on a small farm a man is trained for a lifelong job and it is that or nothing. It is no different in many industrial areas, where skilled men no longer have work because their skills are no longer needed.

Time is always short just before the wind-up speeches, but I am saddened that there has been no more temper in the debate. Mention has been made of the CLA and the NFU. I have not had the CLA on to me, but the NFU has been here in strength. I know how it feels. It is aware that the big man will survive because he always does. But I thought that Parliament and this House were meant to stand up for and look after the small man. I am not prepared to see the people whom I seek to represent destroyed economically because people say, "Oh well, what can we do about it? We belong to a club." I sometimes wonder these days whether that club is worth belonging to.

I shall make my points briefly. My good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) cannot be here today. He is in his constituency dealing with farmers and farmers' interests. But as my hon. Friend the Member for Taverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) said, if £5 million or £50 million is all that is required from national resources, that is very little compared with the vast sums—I play it from Left to Right—that we waste on miners who do not care if their pits fall to pieces, or compared with the vast sums we spend on defence where many of us believe that there are savings that can be made. When we consider the sheer petty-cashery needed to save the way of life of the small farmer, it is unbelievable that a Government who were elected on the promises that they made should no longer be prepared to honour them.

There is to be no Division in which one can show one's shame at the way in which we are treating the industry.

Mr. Home Robertson: Why not?

Mr. Speller: Alas, one hon. Member is not enough to divide the House. Perhaps the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) who shouts out from a sendentary position is too tired to contribute to the debate. But I, for one, am deeply saddened by the tenor of the debate. I know that we are stuck with the system, but some of us now wonder whether, just because we accept the system as it exists, we must also accept that it is good. If it is not good perhaps we should consider changing it, instead of talking about making amendments in Committee or dividing in Committee. We all know very well that in Committee the majority wins.

Today there appears to be a minority of one who says that we are not winning but losing as we destroy the best things in Britain—the countryside, the small farm, and all the beauty of life that goes with them. If we destroy them, we shall be as guilty as those who, over a hundred years ago in Scotland and not so long ago in the north of England, made desolate what was once beautiful thriving countryside. This evening we are contributing to that desolation.

6.43 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me to speak in the rather unfamiliar surroundings of a debate on agriculture. I understand that the Bill deals with compensation to farmers for the imposition of quotas. I am sure that even my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) would support that principle. But for those of us not wholly bound up with farming, the Bill does not go nearly far enough.

Until the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) and for Devon, North no one seemed to recognise that agriculture consists of more than just farmers. Indeed, the ancillary industries which depend on farming have been hit far more severely as a result of milk quotas than any dairy farmer who is to receive compensation under the Bill.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to a company called BOCM Silcock Limited in Avonmouth, in my constituency. It is a mill that manufactures feeding stuffs. For historical reasons, more than 80 per cent. of its production consists of cattle feed. As a result of quotas, that mill will close in the first quarter of 1986 with loss of employment for up to 199 staff. Their jobs will disappear as a result of the imposition of milk quotas. Where in the Bill is there compensation for them?

I am not talking about an inefficient company that is giving an excuse for going out of business. Prior to the imposition of quotas it was economic. The prices of its products were comparable with those elsewhere in the EEC. It achieved a 10 per cent. productivity gain in the years since 1976. It was not overmanned, and shed more than 100 staff in the same period. It was not under-capitalised and in recent years it has built a new silo, a new blending plant and additional bulk loading facilities. In addition, 50 per cent. of its extrusion presses have been replaced. It has improved its warehousing and has computerised vast areas of its operation.

Prior to quotas the company had the option of upgrading its manufacturing unit, and, given turnover continuing at former levels, it would have been economic to do so over a period of two or three years. But then came milk quotas, and in one year its turnover fell by 28 per cent. Consequently, of course, the level of return on capital is unacceptable, the upgrading option is no longer economic and the mill will close. It is worth considering what that will mean to those involved.

All the speeches today have been about people, but they have all been about farmers. I should like to widen the debate's horizons a little and to talk about workers at that mill. The average age of the production staff is 50 or more. The majority of them live within 10 miles of the mill. Within that same area unemployment stands at 30 per cent., which is not large enough to qualify for development area status. There is little alternative employment for those people, and what jobs there are pay substantially lower rates of pay. Therefore, as a result of the imposition of milk quotas, most of them face permanent unemployment.

The average age of the clerical staff is a little over 40. They are mainly female and, because of the special procedures within the mill, most of them will need retraining before they can even consider obtaining another job. But because it is not a development area and because there is no special provision for those parts of the agriculture industry that are not termed "farming", they cannot obtain any retraining grants from the EEC, and there is no provision in the Bill to provide them.

In addition, just to make things slightly worse, the company is a reasonable employer and so will be able to offer the staff some additional redundancy over and above the basic statutory scheme. However, it can do so only on condition that between 80 and 90 per cent. of them stay on until the last day before the mill closes. Therefore, they will not have the option of going out and looking for work. They will have to stay until they are made unemployed.

[Mr. Michael Stern]

I am aware that the outgoers scheme is not designed as a form of social payment and I am not suggesting that it should be. In principle, I support the scheme, but it is designed to compensate those involved in agriculture who have suffered as a result of the Government's action in accepting quotas. The Government accepted quotas and are now saying, "It is fair to use taxpayers' money to compensate those who will suffer most." Why should only farmers be compensated? We are told that farmers are entitled to compensation because they have had to cut production by 9 per cent. over the country as a whole. The mill has had to cut production by 28 per cent. Therefore, why should farmers alone be entitled to compensation?

Some farmers are losing the whole of their livelihood because of the quota scheme. As the Minister rightly says, those farmers for whom we have most sympathy are most entitled to compensation. Some farmers will lose only part of their livelihoods, but the mill workers will lose the whole of theirs. Therefore, why are they not entitled to compensation?

Why is the Bill blinkered so that it deals only with compensation to one small part of a large industry? Why does it not take into account the effects of the Government's action on other parts of the industry? The Government rightly set up the principle that those people most affected by Government action should be compensated. For that reason generous compensation was offered to miners, dockers and steel workers. It is now being offered to farmers. Why is it not being offered to the entire agriculture industry?

If the Government wish to compensate only part of the industry, they must accept that they will not earn the support of hon. Members who are troubled by the suffering in other parts of the industry.

Mr. Home Robertson: I have already drafted an amendment to be tabled in Committee which would provide compensation for people who lose their jobs because of the scheme. Does the hon. Gentleman expect to be nominated as a member of the Committee, and, if so, will he vote for such an amendment?

Mr. Stern: No, I do not expect to be nominated as a member of the Committee. However, when the Bill returns to the Floor of the House, unless it contains provision to compensate people such as those in my constituency I have described, I shall continue to be unable to support it.

6.53 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate. My main criticism of the debate is that it has so far been largely a west country benefit. As I am the only east midland hon. Member to make a speech I shall put our case.

The outgoers scheme was introduced to encourage some dairy farmers to go out of milk production to release quota which can be redistributed to farmers who wish to stay in milk production. The problem is that the present scheme is heavily over-subscribed. On behalf of dairy farmers in my constituency I add my voice to those who urge the Government to extend the present scheme. That would encourage more farmers to cease milk production, and thus make available additional quota for those who wish to remain in production and make a good living at it.

That would particularly help producers who have made application to the quota tribunal as development cases. I understand that there will not be a cut in the base year quota awards and that if the present outgoer scheme is successful, there will not be a cut in the exceptional hardship awards made by the tribunals.

We now understand that substantial cuts of awards to development cases, perhaps of 30 or 40 per cent., may be made. Hardest hit if that happens will be the younger farmers and farmers who, before the imposition of quotas, made long-term financial commitments to develop their farming businesses. They feel that before the imposition of quotas they were encouraged by Government agricultural policies to expand, only to find literally overnight that their plans were in ruins and that no alternatives were available to them.

Dairy farmers in my constituency and in my county feel strongly that milk production quotas should be transferable either by sale or by lease, subject to any necessary restrictions and regulations. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) on this. The linking of quotas to the land puts farmers in a straitjacket. They feel that that should apply to all farmers in the European Community, but they query whether it does and feel that a more robust attitude on the part of my right hon. Friend the Minister in Brussels could relieve them of the adverse effects of that straitjacket.

I shall be interested to hear whether my right hon. Friend is having discussions with his colleagues in the EC about removing that straitjacket. It can do no harm to his Department, nor to the financial position of this country, and my farmers advise me that it could do good to them if it were removed. I look forward to hearing from the Minister in his reply that he will do so.

6.56 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): We have had an interesting debate on a matter which has affected the countryside. All hon. Members will have been told about cases that have created great hardship. However, until the new milk production quotas come into existence, we shall not know the full extent of hardship. There will be a greater effect on rural communities than any hon. Member can guess.

I do not say this in a pejorative sense, but our debate has been rather like a Committee stage, in that all hon. Members, with one exception, have welcomed the Bill, however reluctantly, because it gives a measure of justice to people who, through no fault of their own, will lose their livelihoods. Therefore, we have concentrated on trying to improve the Bill by making suggestions about flexibility.

There has been a fair measure of consensus about those measures. Pleas for flexibility are all very well—I agree with almost every point that was made — but the Government's response to those pleas is what is important. I hope that they will not take our reluctance to vote against the measure, which cushions people who are undergoing hardship, as an excuse for saying that their plan is perfect in every way and that hon. Members will not vote against the Bill because its underlying purpose is good. I hope that the Government will listen to the suggestions of ways to improve the scheme and act on them.

The hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) alone went to the root and branch of the Bill in his criticisms. As he is now absent, may I say through the columns of *Hansard* that he must not take fireworks night too literally

when he makes a controversial speech. This evening he lit the blue touch paper and retired. He has left the Chamber and we cannot consult or debate with him. He would have done much better, after firing such a volley, to wait in the Chamber to hear what hon. Members have to say in reply.

The state and the farming industry have been in partnership since the second world war, with the full assent of farmers. That has greatly benefited the country. On this occasion, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for whatever reason—I accept the defence of him by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris)—changed at short notice the encouragement that the Government have offered for more than 40 years. However, I do not take too seriously his defence of the Minister, who is not so tender a flower as to need people rushing to his aid.

The House should remember that two or three days before he attended the meeting of the Council of Ministers, the Minister pledged undying opposition to the scheme. The only historical parallel that I have been able to find to such a volte face is that of the Duke of Marlborough, who left London at the head of James II's forces and returned at the head of William and Mary's army. With such a short time span and such a radical change in everything that had been expected of dairy farmers for many decades, it is no wonder that there was introduced in the industry instability which bordered on panic for a considerable time.

The introduction of the scheme was an unpleasant shock, and many of us believe that its implementation has been chaotic. There is no question but that many more farmers have appealed against the quotas allocated to them than was foreseen by the Ministry. The Government should have expected many farmers who were faced with the loss of their livelihoods to appeal against the quotas. As a consequence, the tribunals, from their inadequate beginnings, have been stepped up, although they are way behind with their work. We do not know whether their work will be completed by February or March. In the interim, no one has been certain of anything, which must cause great dissatisfaction in the industry. It is ironic that, due partly to the drought that afflicted us last year, Britain will not fulfil its quota.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said in opening, we want a specific assurance that under-production this year will not lead to further pressure for an even lower quota. The panic with which bodies of an official or semi-official nature are trying to encourage farmers to increase their milk production for the rest of the year suggests to the industry that that might be a possibility.

The hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) said that the Bill does not cover all those who will have to leave the dairy industry as a result of the quota scheme agreed by the Minister in Brussels. First, it does not cover tenants, unless with the landlord's consent. I hope to say a little more about that later. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian said that the Opposition would table an amendment seeking an extension of the scheme to cover all those who work in the dairy industry. He used herdsmen as an example, but we believe that the Bill should cover those who work in the dairy products industry, which will have problems different from those of a normal business that fails. It was not that industry's fault that the quota system was agreed; it could do nothing to avoid it.

My major criticism of the Bill is that the existence of the scheme begs several questions that have not yet been answered by Ministers. The first question, which was asked by several hon. Members including the hon. Members for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), for Devizes (Mr. Morrison), and for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon), was whether the Government intended the quota system to protect the small producer and to keep him in operation. If that is the case, it is strange that the scheme is available only to small producers. A Victorian ballad says,

"It's the poor what helps the poor",

but this scheme takes that saying to absurd lengths. The Minister will say, "We have gone from 200,000 to 325,000 litres." He tried to make a virtue of desperation, because farmers are not fulfilling their quotas and are not getting the firm assurances that they wanted. I should have thought that the scheme would be open to larger farmers to facilitate either a whole or—here I agree with the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North—a partial surrender of quota. That would be helpful to the small producer, who could continue with part of his quota as a contribution to a mixed farm, and it would also increase the volume of milk surrendered by some bigger farmers into the pool, which will help the allocation of quotas and avoid some of the hardship that would otherwise be caused to small farmers who specialise in dairy herds.

Secondly, is the Bill intended to protect communities? It is not generally appreciated that the farming industry's most significant role is as the base of rural life. Not only will small farmers face hardship, but, as the hon. and disappearing Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) said, many others who depend upon agriculture directly or indirectly will be affected. Gradually, the entire life of a region will be affected if we change agriculture in ways that have not been fully thought out. I appreciated the contribution of the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), who is from the east of the country, and I agree that in this case there is no north-south divide, but an east-west divide. There is likely to be a split between east and west, with the dairy industry in the west being disadvantaged, unless the Government are more clear about the communities that they hope to see at the end of the reshaping of the dairy industry upon which they have embarked.

The third and most important question that the Government have not answered is what they envisage as the future for the outgoers from the dairy industry. Do they want them to quit agriculture completely? If so, what will those outgoers do? What other occupations could they have? What other forms of agriculture would the Government advise outgoers to take up, if they wish them to change to another product rather than quit agriculture altogether? If the Government wish outgoers to quit altogether, they should consider the environmental effect of the abandonment of large numbers of smallholdings, many of them in very inaccessible places. If a tenant quits with the landowner's blessing, the landowner can put the land to another use, but if a somewhat inaccessible holding is quit by the small owner-occupier, the land will be sterilised for any useful occupation in the future. The Government must decide whether they want outgoers to quit the industry completely or to produce something else. They must take that decision before we can decide whether

[Mr. Brynmor John]

they should accede to the pleas for the extension of the outgoers scheme that have been made by almost every Back Bencher who has spoken today.

It may be the Government's intention to encourage some different form of agriculture. However, under the present terms and conditions of the scheme, the outgoer will not have much chance of changing the way in which he gets his livelihood. It seems that the average compensation is likely to be about £32,000. Such a sum will not buy many sophisticated machines designed to facilitate other types of farming. Also, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian has said, much of the money may already be owed to the bank.

I hope that the Minister of State will answer those points. With a scheme that did not achieve any of the desired objectives—a scheme that simply did not work—we would be in the worst of all possible worlds. In his opening speech, the Minister told us that less than half the number needed have firmly declared their wish to take advantage of the outgoers scheme. He said that he was confident that the required number would apply. However, any restructuring of the industry must be carried out in the most sensible way possible. Is the Minister confident that a restructuring based on the present outgoers scheme will help to create the sensible new industry that would provide the best base for the future?

A number of hon. Members referred to tenant farmers. The right hon. Gentleman said that 45 per cent. of those who have a firm intention to stop milk production are tenants. However, do we know how many landlords, in giving their consent, are asking for extra rental or doing any of the other things described recently in *Farmers Weekly*? How many tenants are suffering changes in conditions because they are taking advantage of the scheme?

In the representations that I have had from farmers, the matter most often mentioned has been the transferability of the quota. The Ministry needs to study more carefully the question of leasing and sale. However, I hope that the simple ability to buy the quota will not be the criterion in consideration of the type of protection to be given. I hope that those who have made a great deal of money out of other forms of agriculture will not be allowed to filch quota away from other parts of the country where it underpins the economy. I think that every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate has called for some safeguard in that area, as well as for flexibility. The Government must consider the matter urgently.

The hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and other hon. Members have referred to the Government's obligation to those who took up development schemes because of the enthusiastic encouragement of the Government. In so doing, a number of people became unwisely over-committed to the banks, and poverty is now staring them in the face. The Government have a responsibility to those whom they encouraged to expand their herds. I hope that they will consider the possibility of allocating extra quota to such people.

I also hope that the Minister of State will clarify the figures. I admit that I cannot understand the simplest figures. However, first of all, we were told that where the tribunal had assessed the need for extra quota, about 35 per cent. less than the sum needed was being allowed because of the insufficient supply of extra quota. Then the Minister said that 11 per cent. would be added in future years. I shall be grateful if the Minister will clarify the relationship between the two figures.

The hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) and the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) both asked about direct sellers. Direct sellers were certainly not given clear information when the scheme was set up and many of them—through an inadvertence that they share with many hon. Members as well as people outside—now find that they have exceeded their quota or that their quota is in the wrong form. Unless direct sellers are treated sympathetically, they will suffer considerable hardship.

The situation is volatile. In principle, the Bill deserves the support of the House. The fact that it does not include everyone does not mean that it will not help those with whom it deals. However, I hope that, in Committee, the Government will consider questions such as the extension of the scheme, and will not hold too firmly to the statement in the Minister's opening speech.

As has been pointed out, even under the Labour Government of 1966-70 one had to wait until Cabinet Ministers were out of office before their memoirs—such as the Crossman memoirs—appeared. However, now we do not have to wait for publication or for the fall of the Government. With a bland disregard for collective responsibility, the Minister of Agriculture tells us what terrible fights he has with the Treasury over sums that are pitifully small in terms of total Government spending or in terms of the Minister's own contingency fund allocation.

Everyone has asked for an extension of the scheme to make it more flexible and to alleviate the hardship that will undoubtedly affect many groups of people in the industry. I hope that the Minister will not regard the sacrosanctity of public expenditure targets as more important than the well being of those who have served the community for a long time. We are discussing comparatively small amounts of money. If the Minister and territorial Secretaries of State cannot form a powerful and noisy wedge in the Cabinet to press the Treasury for extra provision to extend and make the scheme more flexible, I do not believe that he will have discharged the duty to the outgoers that we all recognise.

The Bill should be given a Second Reading. It should be improved vastly in Committee, but the most important thing which should come out of today's debate is not the improvement of the Bill but the improvement of the scheme. It is on the scheme that justice for the dairy industry depends.

7.20 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I have been asked an enormous number of questions during this comparatively short debate. I shall endeavour to answer as many as I can without going on interminably.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister has until 10 o'clock.

Mr. MacGregor: I suspect that the House would think it unwise of me to go on for two and a half hours in response to a debate which was not much longer than that. If I do not deal with all of the issues that have been raised, they can be considered in Committee. Indeed, some of them could equally well have been raised in Committee.

In the opening comments of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) we had yet again an example of the Opposition speaking with two voices. Indeed, the Opposition have almost literally spoken with two voices as only two Opposition Members have spoken. Only two Opposition Members have been present for most of the debate.

Mr. Home Robertson: There have been three.

Mr. MacGregor: Very well. However, I meant two voices in the more usual sense.

The predecessor of the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) as Opposition spokesman on agriculture, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), constantly said that agricultural subsidies were too high. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Pontypridd dissents from that view, but having, as usual, criticised the high level of agricultural subsidies, the Opposition take the easy way out on specific issues and call for even more public expenditure and subsidy. Such was the case today when they urged more subsidy for outgoers; yet they criticise the Government for spending too much on agriculture.

The hon. Member for East Lothian showed schizophrenia in his speech. He lamented the fact that the outgoers scheme would result in people leaving the land, thus having a serious effect on rural areas, and almost in the same breath called for even more expenditure to get even more people off the land. He should consider the implications of some of his arguments. He called the payments to producers under the outgoers scheme inadequate. That can hardly be the case as, unlike other member states, the amount that we are asking for will be taken up in full.

I should like to consider the sole policy point that the hon. Member for East Lothian raised and then deal with the many questions that he asked. He said that the Opposition expect us to ask in the price review, for the United Kingdom only, that the transitional arrangement of an extra 1 per cent. in quota for 1984-85 should be continued next year. In other words, our policy should be to ensure that there is not the expected reduction of 1 per cent. The hon. Gentleman is aware that that was a transitional arrangement, that we still have a substantial surplus of dairy products throughout the Community, and that we have to pay for that transitional arrangement through an extra 1 per cent. on the co-responsibility levy. If they knew that there would have to be an extra 1 per cent. in co-responsibility levy, most farmers would have preferred not to have the transitional arrangement. The hon. Gentleman must face up to what he would do about that extra 1 per cent. If he argues that it should be removed, he should consider where the extra money would come from.

The hon. Gentleman asked about progress in cutting production, as a result of the quota system, throughout the Community. One of the problems is that statistics for October and November are only provisional and none exist for December. However, those estimates suggest that from April to November 1984 milk production in the Community was cut by about 4 per cent. compared with the same period in 1983. The important point is that, for the Community as a whole and for individual member states, as the previous agriculture Commissioner made clear at a Council meeting in December, that downward trend is accelerating. It has taken longer for the downward trend to show through in some member states than it did in the United Kingdom, where the drought and the disciplined response of our producers had an impact.

I must emphasise that the figures are provisional. They are not official statistics and will have to be revised. To give an idea, however, I shall give the statistics for member states from April to November, as previous figures to the end of September suggested that many member states were increasing rather than reducing production. The provisional figures show that production in Belgium is down by 4·6 per cent. compared with the same period in 1983, that in Denmark it is down 6·5 per cent., that in Germany it is down 6 per cent., that in France it is down 1·3 per cent., that in Luxembourg it is down 5·1 per cent. and that in the United Kingdom, as we know it is down 8·9 per cent. Although the figures are provisional, they show that the quota system is beginning to bite in most member states and that production is decreasing towards the targets.

The hon. Member for East Lothian also asked for international comparisons. My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) asked about international comparisons on the outgoers scheme. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) said about our outgoers scheme being relatively generous. It is difficult to make precise comparisons, because the schemes have quite different elements. They might range over a longer period or have different purposes or be directed at particular types of producer. For example, the French are concentrating on those they want out of the industry because they want to restructure it. The scheme is concentrated on the over-55s. Comparison is difficult, but there is no doubt that the United Kingdom has a fair and reasonably generous scheme. The German scheme runs for 10 years and the French scheme is less than ours in regard to the amount paid per litre. I do not have time to go into detail but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford said, analysis would show the British scheme to be relatively generous.

It is important to remember, as my right hon. Friend the Minister has said at Question Time, that there is no sin in not cutting milk production. If member states exceed their quotas, they are penalised through the application of a super-levy. There is no obligation to cut production to quota levels but there is an obligation to collect levy on production which is in excess of quotas. That is why the fair application of the super-levy throughout member states is critical and why we have concentrated so much of our attention on it in recent Council meetings.

The hon. Members for East Lothian and for Pontypridd asked for an assurance that we would not be penalised if we were to fall short of our quota this year. That could well happen because of the impact of the drought. There is no such suggestion in any discussions that I have heard on this matter in the Community, and if it were suggested we should resist it.

Indeed, we would point out, as many other Ministers and the previous Commissioner have said, that one of the reasons why United Kingdom production has come down faster than that of other member states is the drought, which was more marked here. That would obviously be a strong argument we could put if there was any attempt to penalise us for under-production. I can give the assurance asked for by both hon. Gentlemen that we would resist that totally.

[Mr. MacGregor]

In regard to redundancy for farm workers and for other employees in ancillary industries, the hon. Member for East Lothian said that he would be putting forward an amendment that the Bill should provide for redundancy payments for stockmen as well as for outgoers. That is not appropriate for this Bill because it does not deal with redundancy payments. We already have a general statutory redundancy scheme, so redundant stockmen and others would benefit from it. It is not appropriate to compare payments under the outgoers scheme with redundancy payments because the outgoers scheme is not a redundancy scheme. It is important to understand this.

The outgoers scheme is a measure to enable the industry as a whole to adjust to the quota arrangements by making the additional quota available in particular to smaller producers but also to others. It is not a redundancy scheme as such. The number of redundancies among farm workers appears to be limited but, as I have said, it is always open to an employer and an employee to agree more favourable redundancy terms than those available from the protection of the statutory arrangements under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978. They can agree more favourable terms than the statutory minimum, and this has been done in some cases. The Milk Marketing Board is doing so for its creameries.

It is not right to draw an analogy with what the Dutch Government are proposing. They are making specific provision for redundancy payments for people in agriculture because the Dutch Government have no statutory redundancy scheme. This is the big difference. We have a statutory redundancy scheme which will make redundancy payments available to those who are made redundant.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my hon. Friend tell us how this applies to the self-employed? This is news to me. Generally farmers are self-employed.

Mr. MacGregor: What I was asked about in the debate was the position of stockmen, employees of farmers and employees in ancillary industries. The self-employed farmer will be able to take advantage of the outgoers scheme which is intended to restructure the industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) and the hon. Member for East Lothian drew attention to the uncertainty for the farmers who do not yet know what their secondary quota is. They, like several other hon. Members, mentioned some of the difficulties that individual farmers have had with the panel and tribunal system. We have always had two objectives. The important point was to try to get the balance between them. On the one hand, there was the determination to get as much fairness and thoroughness in the appeal system as we could; but, on the other hand, there was a need to complete the process as soon as possible to let producers know exactly where they stood. That was the balance we had to try to achieve, and I believe that in general we have achieved it.

In regard to the uncertainty for outgoers, we were asked why we had made firm offers to producers in tranches. There are two answers. First, we could not give an immediate offer to all who had applied because the scheme was heavily over-subscribed and we could have found ourselves making offers to too many people. We always assumed that some would not wish to take up the offer, but if we had made immediate offers to all and sundry we could have had more commitments than we could meet.

Another important point is that many people in farming were concerned that if all the outgoers went out of production at the same time there would be a severe effect on the market in beef. We have endeavoured to avoid that and I think we have been successful, in view of beef prices. That was another important reason for staging the tranches.

The hon. Member for East Lothian asked me, as did some other hon. Members, why we were insisting that producers should get out in toto if they took up the outgoers scheme and why we could not allow partial surrender of quotas. The straightforward answer is that Community regulations permit us only to make payments to producers who "discontinue milk production definitively". This means that we had to insist that outgoers surrender their entire quota, which can, of course, relate to more than one farm.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton asked again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) had asked my right hon. Friend, whether, if there ever were another outgoers scheme, we would ensure that there was an opportunity for the House to comment on draft regulations. I am sure my hon. Friend realises that it is a hypothetical question, because my right hon. Friend has made it clear that we do not intend to introduce another scheme. He drew attention to the fact that if it occurred there was a precedent in what we did with the quota regulations in July where we gave the House an opportunity to comment before we put forward the final regulations. I have noted the feeling in the House on this. I repeat that it will depend on whether there is another outgoers scheme; but whether one should do it in that way will also depend on what that scheme contains.

My hon. Friend asked me to say what formula was used for the additional allocation of quota this year. He will know that the extra allocation went to Eire, Northern Ireland and Luxembourg, which got a small amount. Basically it went to areas where the total economy was more dependent on dairying than other areas in the Community.

There is no link between the production quotas which have been fixed under the quota system and what was agreed in the price review last March on imports of New Zealand butter. That is why I do not think one could argue the case in future negotiations on the super-levy system because the production quotas were based on delivery and sales levels in members states and not on imports of dairy produce or anything like that. Therefore, there was no link between those two.

My hon. Friend drew attention to a problem which has been raised with me as I have moved around the country and by several of my hon. Friends—the possibility that producers have been treated differently by different panels. In a system that has had to be introduced and carried through with the rapidity that we wanted so as to leave producers clear where they stood on quotas, it is not possible to ensure absolute and complete consistency, but we have made every endeavour to do that. The key point is that the setting up of the tribunal system, where it is easier to achieve consistency, gives producers who feel that they have been treated unfairly the opportunity to appeal. The tribunal system gives that safeguard.

My hon. Friend talked about discrimination against the small producer who carried out improvements without the expander scheme or a loan from the bank. There is no discrimination in the regulations on that point. In general we do not believe that local panels or tribunals are making such discrimination, but producers must be able to demonstrate that they have carried out or committed themselves to investment which is leading to the increase in output that they are claiming. In some cases producers have not been able to satisfy panels that the work they have done will produce the expansion in production which they are claiming.

In regard to my hon. Friend's question about statutory provision for tax treatment, as I think he will know, the non-statutory scheme which will be in existence until the Bill is passed gives producers the choice of two types of payment and gives favourable tax treatment for payments under the outgoers scheme. The tax treatment given to these two types of payment results from the provisions of general taxation legislation and the way in which the outgoers scheme was conceived. The same will apply to any future statutory scheme. Therefore, it is not necessary to provide for the tax treatment in a Bill of this sort.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) and I have debated endlessly why the quota system was introduced and whether it is fair to the United Kingdom. He knows why we felt that in the end it was inevitable. He knows why we dispute entirely his charge that the outcome was unfair to United Kingdom producers. In fact, we got a very good deal.

I shall not go into that, but I wish to comment in particular on three of the points which the hon. Gentleman made. He argued that the outgoers scheme did not acknowledge the plight of small producers and did not do enough for the rural areas. He asked for the precise figures on the outgoers scheme in Wales as distinct from the 1,186 which my right hon. Friend quoted for England and Wales. So far, 213 Welsh producers have firmly responded to the firm offer of the outgoers scheme, but the objective of the scheme is to give that extra allocation to small producers who wish to stay in business and to bring them back to their 1983 levels. That is particularly effective in the rural areas such as Wales.

So far, there has been a considerable redistributative effect to small producers in Wales as a result of the outgoers scheme. It looks as though it will operate to the advantage of Welsh small producers, because while Wales accounts for only 15 per cent. of the outgoers so far signed up, about 25 per cent. of the reallocated quota will go to small producers in Wales. That is a clear indication of how the scheme has been directed to help small producers and rural areas in Wales.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I am grateful to the Minister for trying to clarify the position in order to avoid a slanging match. I respect the hon. Gentleman in many ways, and he has been very fair in many of our debates. Out of the 200 small farmers in Wales who have accepted the outgoers scheme, how many have herds of fewer than 40 cows?

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will table a specific question on that. I suspect that the vast majority have fewer than 40 cows, because in the early stages the scheme has concentrated on small producers.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that part quotas should be introduced into the outgoers scheme. As I have already said, we are bound by the Community regulations.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that a producer who had to sell his herd would face a considerable tax payment, thereby reducing the amount available either to start another business or to reduce his overdraft. He knows that, in addition to the favourable treatment in the outgoers scheme, we have through the herd basis on taxation given favourable treatment to the producer who wants to get out and who gets rid of 20 per cent. or more of his total herd. Under the herd basis, the proceeds of selling the herd will be totally tax free. In addition, we made a change in the Finance Act 1984 to enable much greater flexibility this year and last so that the producer could elect for the herd basis and take advantage of it. That is an important point in relation to tax treatment and the proceeds available to continue a business in another direction.

Mr. Geraint Howells *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: In view of the time, I shall not give way. I am fairly certain that the hon. Gentleman and I will have an opportunity to debate this further in Committee.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) for his opening remarks. He said that the system was beginning to settle down. We have tried to operate the scheme as helpfully and flexibly as we possibly could within the rules ever since it was introduced.

My hon. Friend urged that there should be greater interchange between wholesale and direct sale quotas, particularly for mixed businesses. We entirely agree, and for many months in Council meetings we have endeavoured to get a change. We have put forward a proposal to the Commission and the Council which will achieve that without undermining the super-levy system. The previous agriculture Commissioner said that he would consider this, but the previous Commission was clearly reluctant to make any changes in its latter months. My right hon. Friend and I will again raise this point with the new Commissioner Mr. Andriessen, when we meet him tomorrow. We have it very much in mind.

Within the existing rules we have the opportunity, through the MMB, to undertake a swap shop. As my hon. Friend may know, we have now reached agreement on how that will operate, and the information has now gone out to producers from the MMB. That will present a limited possibility at least of getting greater flexibility and interchange between wholesale and direct sale quotas.

My hon. Friend also raised the much wider issue of transferability of quota generally. It was also referred to by the hon. Member for East Lothian, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford, who called for leasing of quotas, my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) and the hon. Member for Pontypridd. We would like to see much greater flexibility in the quota system and more transferability of quota. The first aim was to get the outgoers scheme operating; that was what we concentrated on. We are now moving to ideas on the transferability of quota, and I understand why so many hon. Members have raised this issue. I agree that it is desirable to try to achieve something.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd suggested that there was almost unanimous agreement about what should be done. It is not as simple as that, because there are many difficult problems. However, this is an appropriate

[Mr. MacGregor]

opportunity to tell the House that in the last few days we have issued a consultative document entitled "Mobility of Quota". I have it with me. It goes into all the issues and difficulties raised by hon. Members who have asked for greater transferability of quota, and is a genuine consultation document. There are many issues to be decided and we are also going out to the industry for consultation. I urge my hon. Friends to obtain a copy of this document. It is in the Library. Alternatively, I shall happily provide them with a copy so that we can obtain their views.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: How do we obtain copies of the consultative document?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that hon. Members would wish to have copies of their own, and if they contact my office I shall ensure that they get them immediately.

Whatever we finally decide should be obtained for the United Kingdom, it must be agreed by the Commission and in the Council. One way or another we must ensure that it is put on the negotiating table. That will not be easy. But the consultation document outlines the direction in which we should like to go and shows that this is the next stage on which we would like to see action.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes also spoke of the delay in informing people of their quota, particularly their secondary quota. I have partly dealt with that, but another important point is that up to September no super levy in England and Wales will be paid this year for producers who overproduced. That may well be the position at the end of the year. For the year as a whole, in England and Wales there is room for some recovery of production. So long as production in the three months from January to March 1985 is not more than about 2 per cent. above production in the same period last year, no levy will be payable by wholesale producers selling to the MMB at the end of the marketing year. That is important for those who still do not know what their secondary quotas are.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Nicholson) specifically asked about our proposals for the outgoers scheme in Northern Ireland. We are still assessing the results of the scheme throughout the United Kingdom. We do not yet know the outcome, but we are aware that a shortfall will occur in Northern Ireland. As my right hon. Friend said this afternoon, we and our colleagues concerned with agriculture, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, are looking at whether there are ways of dealing with difficulties which arise from this disappointing response.

The amount of payment of levy due from Northern Ireland will be a good deal less than the £5 million at the end of September which the hon. Gentleman suggested. We have made it clear, as has the Prime Minister, that the supplementary levy arrangements must be applied properly by all member states. We are not prepared to see our producers disadvantaged compared with others. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that at the end of the day, depending on the outcome of discussions in the new Council and with the new Commission, we still have a liability to a payment in Northern Ireland up to the end of September.

But we are keeping the situation under review. We have to be ready to collect and pay over any levies which may be due to us once the legal position becomes clearer and we are satisfied that other member states are conforming to the requirements, always depending upon the outcome of further discussions which are taking place currently in the Council.

Mr. James Nicholson: I am grateful to the Minister for recognising that at the end of the day the money is still there and that the Bill is still against the farmers in Northern Ireland. However, will he deal with the point I made regarding the quality of the relationship between farmers in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, especially the small farmers and bringing up to 1983 levels those producers with fewer than 200,000 litres?

Mr. MacGregor: That is very much tied up with the outcome of the discussions which we are having on the outgoers scheme and the disappointing response in Northern Ireland. I can go no further this evening than to say to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh that we are aware of the problem and that we are discussing it.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) raised a point about direct sellers and asked for clear guidance on the position of direct sellers if they have overproduced by the end of the year. The hon. Member is quite right. Direct sellers are not under the same formula B as the wholesale producers in England and Wales. Therefore, individual sellers who were over their quota at the end of the year would be liable to the super levy. I am very much aware of some of the points which the hon. Member for Truro and other hon. Members have made about the position of direct sellers. We are anxious to obtain greater flexibility for them. I take the point that they are producing for a market. They are not producing for intervention. This is a very important aspect.

The hon. Member also asked about the co-responsibility levy, as did my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). We have to take into account the fact that the co-responsibility levy raises a considerable sum of money which goes into the dairy products pot in the Community. It was estimated to be £412 million in 1984 for the Community as a whole. It is put to certain uses, such as promotional campaigns, the school milk programme, the normal disposal measures relating to butter, and so on. If the co-responsibility levy disappeared, either we should be back to the budgetary problem or we should have to drop some of those schemes.

There is, therefore, still a problem. We share the hon. Member's view about the co-responsibility levy. We are anxious that its impact should be reduced. Provided that everything else could be sorted out, we should welcome a proposal to abolish it, but it would have to be looked at in the context of the other measures to continue restraint in the milk sector.

Mr. Penhaligon: On the co-responsibility levy, the point which the Minister makes regarding the use to which the money is put to get rid of the surplus—the schools programme and so on—is logical, but what part of the £400 million that is raised would be used?

Mr. MacGregor: All of it would go into those sorts of schemes. A few days ago I saw a precise breakdown of where it has gone in the last year, but I was unable to get hold of it for this debate. If, therefore, the hon. Member will table a question I shall make sure that he receives an answer almost immediately. My hon. Friend the Member

for St. Ives asked for more flexibility and said that the quotas should not necessarily be linked to the land. One of the main points of the mobility of quota paper is precisely that. I am sure that he will wish to study the paper and let us have his comments.

My hon. Friend also asked when, under the outgoers scheme, the allocation of quota to bring small producers up to the 1983 level would occur. My right hon. Friend dealt with this point. Briefly, my right hon. Friend said that this year, because most of the producers coming out of the outgoers scheme have already used up a great deal of their quota for this year, there is not a great deal left and that we shall be concentrating on hardship cases. But the small producers may find that there is no levy to be paid at the end of this year and that we have every intention of making sure that the small producers of fewer than 200,000 litres are in 1985-86 brought up in full to the 1983 production levels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) attacked the quota system as a whole. I dislike the controls and the bureaucracy that quotas entail, but I hope that my hon. Friend recognises that there is a limit to the financial support that we can give for producing surpluses that cannot be sold on the market and that go into intervention stores. The amount of support for the dairy industry last year—my hon. Friend gave the impression that there was none—was colossal. In 1984 it amounted to £3,400 million across the Community as a whole and to several hundred million pounds in this country. One could do without the bureaucracy of schemes of this sort if we dispensed with financial support of that kind, but I suspect that my hon. Friend's constituents would not appreciate it. Since we could not obtain a solution based upon a reduction in price, which itself would not have been heinous, we had to accept the quota system.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) asked a question during my right hon. Friend's speech. I can confirm to the right hon. Member, as my right hon. Friend said, that there is no restriction in the Community legislation upon the reallocation of the outgoers quota across regional boundaries. However, we would need to look again at the detailed provisions of our own dairy produce quotas regulations if we wished to do this. We should need to specify precisely how the transfer was to be carried out. However, there is no bar upon it under the Community regulations.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Did I understand the Minister earlier in his speech to say that in order to make such transfers we should have to go to the Community for its agreement? Perhaps that was said in a different context.

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not think that is what my right hon. Friend said. That is not the case. It is possible within the Community regulations.

I come finally to the points made by the hon. Member for Pontypridd. I hope that he will forgive me, in view of the fact that I have been speaking for a long time, if I do not go into some of the wider issues which he raised. They were interesting issues which we shall have to debate later about the impact on rural areas, but on this Bill it would not be appropriate for me to take up the time of the House upon them. However, I should like to deal with one or two of the hon. Member's specific points.

The hon. Member asked whether it is the Government's intention, through the outgoers scheme, to keep the small producer in operation. The answer absolutely is yes. The primary objective of the outgoers scheme is to reallocate quotas to the small producer who is staying in milk production. The hon. Member hinted that because we started by making firm offers to those small producers who want to come out we were, in a sense, letting the small producer help the small producer, but I repeat that the primary objective is to reallocate the quota. Since there was over-subscription of the outgoers scheme, we took the view that it was sensible to allow those small producers who wished voluntarily to come out of milk production to have the first option to do so, but it was in no sense an attempt to say that small producers are helping small producers. If no small producers had taken up the firm offer of the outgoers scheme, we should then have gone on to the next stage—the producers. However, I repeat that the primary objective is to give the small producer who wishes to stay in an opportunity to stay in at his 1983 production levels.

Finally, the hon. Member asked me to clarify the position on two of the figures to which my right hon. Friend referred in his opening speech—the 35 per cent. and the 11 per cent. I well understand the difficulty which the hon. Member has with some of the figures, but there is no real connection between the two. The 35 per cent. is an indication — it can be no more than that at the moment — of the amount of scaling down which may have to happen to the special cases—expanders—when we see finally what the tribunals have awarded and what the panels which have not gone to the tribunal have awarded.

We made it clear from the outset that we should allow a certain proportion to be deducted from the primary quota in order to provide for those special cases but that it was very probable that it would not be sufficient and that therefore there would have to be a scaling down. We made it clear throughout that there may have to be quite substantial scaling down. My right hon. Friend said today that at this stage it could be up to 35 per cent., but we have to be very clear that it is still a tentative figure because there is still a great deal of work to be done as the tribunal figures come through.

The 11 per cent. related to the reallocation of quota to small producers next year. The 11 per cent. figure will enable small producers to return to the 1983 production levels next year. That may sound a little odd since the reduction for 1983 was 9 per cent., so let me explain briefly.

If the original primary allocation of primary quota to the small producer was 9 per cent. below its 1983 level, it has to be rather over 9 per cent. above the 1984-85 level to take him back to his 1983 level. But there is the further point that the additional 1 per cent. that will have to be reduced next year because the transitional period runs out will not apply to that small producer. Therefore, we have said that it will be 11 per cent. to enable a small producer to return to his 1983 production level without any penalty on the loss of the transitional period. I hope that that explains briefly a rather complicated matter.

I hope that I have dealt with most of the issues that have been raised in the debate. It has come through clearly from the debate that there is broad support for the Bill. Some, inevitably, would wish it to go further, but it has broad support. We are anxious to get it on the statute book for the cause of the small producers. Therefore, I hope that it will have a fair and quick wind in Committee.

[Mr. MacGregor]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

MILK (CESSATION OF PRODUCTION) BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill ("the Act"), it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any payments made under the Act by a Minister of the Crown for the purpose of compensating persons, who are or have been registered in the direct sales register or a wholesale register maintained under the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1984, for discontinuing milk production; and

(b) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums repaid to a Minister of the Crown under the Act.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

European Community (Fisheries Arrangements)

8 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10171/84 and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's unnumbered explanatory memorandum on 1985 total allowable catches and quotas; of the unnumbered explanatory memorandum on 1985 catch quotas in Greenland waters, and of the unnumbered explanatory memoranda on the fisheries agreements for 1985 between the European Community and Norway, the European Community and the Faroe Islands and the European Community and Spain; of European Community Documents Nos. 10697/84 on technical conservation measures and 10264/84 on 1985 fish guide prices; and welcomes and approves the provisional agreement reached on these arrangements for 1985 with the improvements obtained for the United Kingdom fishing industry.

The motion before the House makes it clear that tonight's debate covers a number of documents on EC fisheries legislation, most of which are concerned with the fishing arrangements for 1985 under the common fisheries policy.

Those documents have been recommended for the further consideration of the House by the Select Committee on European Legislation. We are, as always, grateful to the Committee for its careful scrutiny of these matters, particularly on this occasion when, I understand, it held a meeting yesterday in addition to its planned programme in order to deal with some of the later documents which have come before us.

Before going into detail on the various documents, I should first explain that the complete proposals on total allowable catches and quotas and on the third country agreements were presented on 18 December for discussion at the Fisheries Council the very next day, and that, after lengthy negotiations, a compromise package emerged to which all the other member states were able to give their agreement.

I considered that that package was satisfactory for the United Kingdom, too, but, in view of the recommendation of the Select Committee, I entered a formal reservation on the adoption of the regulations for 1985, pending a debate in the House.

However, in order that fishing should not be interrupted, I agreed that the regulations should be adopted on an interim basis to 20 January only, pending clarification of the United Kingdom position following completion of the Parliamentary scrutiny procedures. Therefore, the position of the House is fully reserved.

I should also mention that the proposals on guide prices for 1985, which were considered by the Select Committee on 14 November, came before the Council for urgent adoption in a revised form on 4 December. Given the nature of the proposals, and the need for a number of detailed implementing measures to be taken before the new prices could take effect on 1 January, I judged that it would not be in our interest to hold up adoption.

Therefore, I subsequently wrote explaining this decision to the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) who is so assiduous about such matters, and I am glad to say that with his customary understanding he was able fully to accept my explanation.

Having dealt with these procedural questions, let me now deal with the substance of the measures involved. I shall deal first with the TACs and quotas for 1985 covered by document 10171/84 and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum of 4 January.

The annual fixing of TACs and quotas is of course one of the principal cornerstones of the common fisheries policy, determining as it does the opportunities for fishermen, and it is of particular concern to the United Kingdom given our major interest in most of the stocks concerned.

In 1984, agreement was reached on the TACs and quotas for the year at the end of January, but we and the other member states were determined this time to make every effort to settle TACs and quotas for 1985 before the beginning of the year, so as to give the industry a clear basis on which to plan. That we have now achieved, subject only to my own parliamentary reservation, and I see that as an important step forward in the development of the common fisheries policy as an effective instrument of fisheries regulation and management. I should also add that that was no easy achievement, given in particular the need for prior negotiations with a number of third countries, notably Norway.

Therefore, I think it right to pay tribute both to the Commission and to the Irish President of the council, that an acceptable compromise package was reached in the course of a single day's negotiations, particularly as a full set of proposals was not available until the day before the Council meeting.

I shall now outline the main elements of interest to the United Kingdom, starting with the North sea joint stocks. Here, there are increases in the availability of all white fish stocks, as agreed with Norway in the light of the latest scientific advice.

The higher United Kingdom quotas for cod, haddock and saithe in particular, representing increases of 15 per cent., 19·8 per cent. and 11·1 per cent. respectively, will be most welcome to our fishermen both north and south of the border.

In particular, it is gratifying that North sea cod, about which concern has been expressed in the House on a number of occasions, has shown enough signs of recovery to enable the TAC to be increased significantly for 1985.

It has not yet proved possible to reach agreement with Norway on the problem of the allocation of the North sea herring stock. But, without sacrificing our existing firm position on that issue, it has been agreed that negotiations will continue in the course of 1985.

In the meantime, both parties will regulate their herring fisheries independently on an interim basis in the light of the scientific advice. That involves a provisional TAC for the Community sector of 320,000 tonnes.

The United Kingdom quota in the northern and central zones—IV A and B—which is more important for us than the southern zone, IV C, is to be 58,490 tonnes, more than double our figures for 1984. For the southern zone, IV C, our quota has also increased to 9,700 tonnes, and the provision allowing the transfer of a part of this quantity in IV C to the central North sea, IV B has been increased from 20 to 25 per cent. So we could using that transfer mechanism, fish 60,915 tonnes in IV A and B and 7,275 in IV C.

That allocation between the three North sea areas therefore constitutes for the United Kingdom a considerable improvement over the Commission's original proposal and I know that the fishing industry attaches great importance to the changes which were achieved in the negotiation.

The quantities of North sea mackerel available to the Community under the agreement with Norway have also been also increased. In previous years, the United Kingdom had not been awarded a quota for this stock, but in this year's package several member states, including the United Kingdom have been allocated a small quantity, of 330 tonnes, mainly intended to cover unavoidable by-catches of mackerel in the North sea herring fisheries.

I come to stocks which lie outside the North sea. The TACs for west of Scotland haddock and herring will be lower than in 1984 in the light of clear scientific advice on the state of these stocks. I was, however, able to ensure that the figures in the final package were significantly higher than those originally proposed by the Commission. This is particularly important for the west coast herring fishery.

The so-called Manx herring TAC is further increased for 1985 to 4,400 tonnes, which will be particularly welcome to the Northern Irish boats which mainly prosecute this fishery.

The TAC for western mackerel, a stock of great importance to the United Kingdom fishing industry, is to be reduced following firm scientific advice. However, as I believe our industry recognises, this reduction is clearly in the best interest of the long-term conservation of the stock, and it should not in practice restrict the activities of our fishermen, as the reduced United Kingdom quota for 1985, of 220,000 tonnes, is still higher than our expected catch, which was about 185,000 tonnes in 1984.

Before leaving the question of TACs, I should mention a group of small but locally important white fish stocks in area VII; that is, the Irish sea, Bristol channel, Western approaches and English channel. During 1984, the TACs for this group of stocks and the management of the United Kingdom quotas attracted a great deal of attention, and although we were able to get a number of the TACs increased and arrange quota swaps with other member states, it was unfortunately necessary to close certain of the sole and plaice fisheries at various stages in the year.

Despite this, the Commission's original proposals for 1985 would have meant reductions in the United Kingdom quota for some of these stocks, and I thus pressed strongly for these proposals to be reconsidered.

I am glad to report that the compromise package retains the quotas for all the area VII white fish stocks at least the 1984 level, while in the case of certain stocks of particular interest to our fishermen—notably, sole in both sections of the English channel and plaice both in the Irish sea and in the English channel — we have secured modest increases.

We shall of course continue to have to manage these, and, indeed, many of the other, quotas carefully, since the fishing opportunities they provide are by no means unlimited. Nevertheless, I can confidently state that the outcome of the Council's deliberations on the quotas for 1985 represents an exceedingly good package for the United Kingdom fishing industry, and it has been warmly welcomed by the fishermen's representatives, and I have no hesitation in commending it to the House.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Do not the improvements in TACs and United Kingdom quotas place an additional responsibility on the

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

Sea Fish Industry Authority more effectively to promote the sale of fish throughout the United Kingdom? Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied with the performance of that authority?

Mr. Jopling: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised that important point. I am sure that he is pleased to know that the Community has agreed to a programme which facilitates this important work and I am sure that the House is grateful to him for drawing its attention to that point.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): We are glad that the TACs are in place for 1985 at such an early stage. Causing the industry some concern in the latter part of 1984 was the fact that for saithe in the North sea the Commission had a stoppage of fishing before France and Belgium had fully fished their quotas. Concern was expressed that at a future time there might be a premature stoppage of fishing of a particular species perhaps before we had fished our quota. Has that been discussed by the Council of Ministers, and may we have an assurance that there will not be such a premature stoppage at a future date?

Mr. Jopling: I cannot give an assurance that there will not be a stoppage of that sort. We have discussed this matter in the Council. The Community must look at the total amount of fish caught. It is possible that a situation could arise — the hon. Gentleman has drawn the attention of the House to such a situation — when, because of over-fishing by one nation, the fishery must be closed before all the other countries with a quota in the area have fished their quotas. This is an unsatisfactory matter. I will now deal with the point which the hon. Gentleman has raised. We have consistently stressed to the European Commission the need to ensure that the rules of the common fisheries policy are properly enforced by all member states.

It was largely as a result of our efforts that the Commission set up its own fisheries inspectorate to investigate the way in which the common fisheries policy rules are enforced by the Administrations of member states, and I am pleased to say that we saw a good deal of progress in 1984. I appreciate that, rightly, the House has been keenly interested in this issue during the last year.

The inspectorate carried out a programme of over 50 visits to member states in 1984, as a result of which a number of irregularities were uncovered. We have asked the Commission to produce a report on the first year's operation of the inspectorate and have made it clear that we shall be looking to the Commission to propose suitable penalties for any systematic overfishing of quotas which can be proven.

This relates to the intervention of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) because the key point is to spot at an early stage the moment when a nation has over-fished its quota, so that when the fishery is closed, other people do not have to suffer. We are alert to this difficult problem and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to work on the matter.

In 1985, further improvements in quota observance should result from the introduction of standard log books and landings returns, which are now expected to be enforced throughout the Community by 1 April. This is welcome progress and it is a date which we extracted from the commissioner as a result of our own initiative.

I come to the various arrangements for fishing in third country waters and at Greenland, as well as the reciprocal arrangements for third country fishermen in member states' waters. In view of the potential interest of the House in these matters, I made my agreement to these proposals also subject to the parliamentary reservation which I have explained.

I start with Greenland. Because the treaty covering Greenland's withdrawal from the Community had not been ratified by all member states within the agreed timetable, Greenland now remains, legally speaking, a part of the Community, although the withdrawal treaty is expected to come into full force later this month.

The Council accordingly agreed, subject to my reservation, interim arrangements pending the entry into force of the withdrawal treaty and the associated fisheries agreement. These arrangements are described in the unnumbered explanatory memorandum of 3 January.

The quotas are, with one exception, at the level provided for in the protocol to the long-term fisheries agreement. The exception is for cod at west Greenland, where scientific advice has indicated that the stock is in a serious condition. In order to allow fishing to continue without prejudicing the decision which it will be for the Greenland authorities to take after withdrawal, German and United Kingdom vessels will be able to fish until 31 January against the balance of their quotas remaining uncaught from 1984—although I must make it clear that United Kingdom catches in Greenland waters in 1984 were in fact very low.

To move from Greenland's icy waters to those of Norway, I have already explained that agreement was eventually reached in mid-December with Norway on a reciprocal fisheries arrangement for 1985 on a basis that is very satisfactory for the United Kingdom. Apart from the increases already mentioned in the availabilities of the joint stocks, the agreement—which is described in the unnumbered explanatory memorandum of 21 December — maintains our white fish quotas at Norway, which constitute the major remaining fisheries of interest to our distant-water fleet, and reductions were secured—at our request in these negotiations — in the allocation to Norway of western mackerel and west of Scotland herring.

On North sea herring, there will be no Norwegian access to the Community zone, pending the conclusion of further negotiations on the allocation of the stock. I hope that it will be possible to reach agreement on this in the course of 1985, as there are clear dangers to the long-term conservation of the stock if joint management arrangements cannot be restored. However, it must be said that the two sides are still far apart, and agreement will be very difficult to achieve, even on an ad hoc basis for 1985, let alone on the zonal attachment which both sides agree in principle should form the basis of lasting arrangements, as is the case with the other main joint stocks in the North sea.

The agreement with the Faroe Islands, as described in the unnumbered explanatory memorandum of 21 December, is of little interest to the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, it contains certain improvements from our point of view, notably reductions in the allocation to the Faroes of western mackerel and west of Scotland herring, and an exchange of letters committing the Faroes to

negotiate constructively in the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation in June on the level of its intercepting salmon fisheries.

The final third country agreement mentioned in the motion is that with Spain. Given Spain's impending accession to the Community, which is a matter somewhat beyond the scope of tonight's debate, it has been agreed that Spain should in principle retain the same fishing opportunities in Community waters in 1985 as she obtained in 1984, and I think that this is only right. The arrangements are described in the unnumbered explanatory memorandum of 21 December, and the only change over last year is that the number of licences for the Spanish hake fishery will be reduced from 118 to 106.

That concludes my review of the TACs and third country agreements for 1985, but I think that the House would expect me to say a brief word about two other items that are covered by tonight's motion.

First, there is document 10697/84, which contains two proposals to amend the technical conservation regulation. One is simply that a decision on an increase in the mesh size for nets used in the English channel, which was due to be taken by 31 December 1984, should be deferred until 1 July 1987. This follows the most recent scientific advice that it has not been possible to make reliable assessments of the effects of mesh size changes in the channel because of the lack of appropriate data. I regret that this is so, but the Commission is now fully aware of the need to ensure that appropriate data are gathered, and I am hopeful that a proper assessment will be possible before the new deadline in 1987.

The same document also contains proposals to amend rules which apply to vessels fishing with beam trawls within 12 miles of our coasts. The present rules, which exclude from the 12-mile belt beam trawlers over 70 gross registered tonnes or 300 brake horsepower, have, as many hon. Members will be aware, proved extremely difficult to enforce. These new proposals are a development of proposals put forward earlier last year and debated in this House on 3 July. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State explained then, further consideration was to be given to other criteria for identifying a vessel's size.

As a result, the Commission's latest proposals include a formula for defining size by the product of the beam of a vessel and its overall length. All vessels which on that basis exceeded 120 sq m would then be prohibited from fishing within 12 miles of coasts with beam trawls. The proposal also includes an attempt to define engine power more precisely and to overcome problems associated with the derating of engines.

We are concerned to improve the enforceability of the rules governing beam trawling, but we are not convinced that these proposals will achieve this, not least because they are too complicated and likely to be too restrictive. We are not, however, alone in having reservations about this matter, and before the meeting of the Council on 4 December, it was agreed that this matter needed further study in a working group. The United Kingdom will of course be participating in that group, and we shall be taking fully into account the views and interests of the industry.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): My right hon. Friend will appreciate that there are those among us who think, for good fishery conservation reasons, that it would have been better if there had been no trawlers at all. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind, particularly in that part of the North sea, the problems of British Telecom, as the beam trawlers fish up the telephone lines between here and Europe?

Mr. Jopling: I am glad to say that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry rather than me, although I am concerned to hear about it. Beam trawling is probably one of the most controversial matters in fishing, as my hon. Friend probably knows as well as I do. If he wishes to make speeches advocating that beam trawling should be banned altogether, I recommend him to go and to try his luck in Brixham, and see how that goes down.

The final document before the House is 10264/84, which contains the Commission's proposals for guide prices in 1985. The importance of these prices lies in the fact that they are used to calculate the withdrawal prices that members of the fish producers' organisations must observe if they are to receive compensation from FEOGA for fish which has to be withdrawn from the human consumption market, and the Commission's proposals are in three parts.

The first of these is of greatest importance because it covers the main species of commercial value to United Kingdom fishmen. These are cod, plaice, herring and mackerel, and in this part of the Commission's proposal there is provision for increases ranging from nil to 6 per cent. Taken as a whole, the proposal seemed to us to have been drawn up on a sensible basis.

Nevertheless, we managed in subsequent discussion to secure agreement that the guide prices for plaice should be increased by three percentage points for the first four months of the year and by two further percentage points for the rest of the year, and that the guide price for cod should be increased by 6 per cent. instead of the 5 per cent. proposed by the Commission. Conversely, and as a consequence of adjustments made to reflect the concerns of other member states, the proposed increase for haddock was reduced by one percentage point to 5 per cent.

Overall, however, the changes made to the Commission's proposals represented on balance an improvement which should be welcome to United Kingdom fishermen. As I explained earlier, it was important to reach agreement sufficiently early in December to allow all the other prices derived from the guide prices to be applied from the beginning of the new fishing year in January; otherwise fishermen would have lost the benefit of new and higher price levels for the first few weeks of the new year. For that reason, I hope that the House will understand why, at the Fisheries Council on 4 December, I agreed to the modified guide price proposals, which all other member states were also in a position to adopt.

This occasion provides me with the opportunity, however, to commend to the House the revised proposals and all those in the other documents before us tonight covering the many aspects of the common fisheries policy. I hope that what I have said will have been enough to convince the House that the arrangements for 1985 which we have been able to negotiate, including the improvements that we have obtained for the benefit of the United Kingdom fishing industry, are satisfactory. I have no hesitation in asking the House to approve these proposals.

8.30 pm

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): I might be breaking with protocol by starting with a series of thanks. I thank the Minister for arranging this debate, for putting in the reserve the request of the Select Committee on European Legislation and for enabling us, at the earliest opportunity after the recess, to have the debate for which the Opposition pressed. I am grateful to the Minister for his efforts in producing this debate. I pass on the thanks of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, who is very grateful and who wishes his thanks for this debate to be relayed.

Somewhat unusually, I thank the Deliverer of the Vote and his staff because a vast stack of documents were becoming available only during the recess. I thank them for making those documents available to me and other hon. Members at the earliest opportunity. I thank them also for all the hard work they have done to ensure that this plethora of material has been made available for tonight's debate.

On behalf of the fishing industry I repeat the thanks that have been expressed to me by Scottish, English and Welsh fishermen that an agreement was reached before 1 January and that we did not have to go through the farce of acting as though 1 January did not exist. I am sure that the whole fishing industry, whatever the detailed arguments it has against little bits, is delighted and thanks the Council of Ministers in general and our Ministers in particular for what has been achieved. It is a marvellous achievement, after the years of uncertainty that have surrounded the fishing industry, to know when the fishing year starts. Regrettably, the fact that fishermen have not known for the past eight years when the year started was a symptom of the disasters they have faced.

I thank the Minister on behalf of the fishing industry for the 16,000 extra tonnes of North sea cod and the 20,000 extra tonnes of North sea haddock quotas. Along with many other hon. Members I have received a briefing note from the Scottish Fishermens Federation which states that North sea cod quotas will increase by approximately 16,000 tonnes. The federation states:

"there are also smaller increases in our Quotas of North Sea Whiting, Saithe and Plaice and all in all the outcome should ensure a good year's fishing for the White Fish Sector of the Scottish fleet and at the same time go some considerable way towards meeting the problems encountered by the Processing Side of the Industry in 1984."

I convey to the Government also the thanks of the Scottish fishing industry and the Tyneside and Shields fishing industry for the strong stance the Government are taking in the negotiations with Norway. We are clearly in the lead, and the Government have the support of the east coast herring fishing industry totally and unequivocally. The demands made by the Norwegian Government are extravagant and unacceptable, and this Government will have the total support, and the thanks, of the British fishing industry, especially on the east coast, for their stand in negotiations with the Norwegians over these North sea stocks.

So much for the thanks. I now turn to a number of small questions, some of which were raised by the Minister. Did we fish any cod off the west coast of Greenland during 1984? Is it other than a paper transaction? I suspect that we have not fished that cod, that we have not wished to fish it or have had the capacity to fish it. Therefore, to include this measure is nonsense and to pretend that it is a significant part of any package helps no one.

The exchange of notes and the letter received from the Chief Minister of the Faroes leads me to suspect that, before too long, there could be a Faroese salmon war unless we are careful. At long last, we may have picked someone of our own size in such matters with whom to have a fight. The relationship between the Faroese assault on north Atlantic salmon fisheries and that by Greenland is like the relationship between a gnat and a vulture. I am afraid that we are straining to reach an agreement on salmon catches with the Faroese while we are permitting catches to be made in Greenland waters with no apparent difficulty.

I should like the Minister to be clear about the relationship between the white fish and pelagic fisheries fished by the Faroese and the discussions occurring within the confines of the north Atlantic salmon fishing arrangements and the reserved position the Faroese Government have taken if those arrangements should fail. We appear to be getting fairly close to going to war with the Faroes over a few salmon while the vast quantity of Greenland salmon are left untouched. That would be unsatisfactory to the Faroese and wholly unsatisfactory to our salmon fisheries.

The Minister mentioned en passant the control of trawling within the 12-mile limit on certain parts of our coast. Having read the documents, I can only agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the present proposals on derating of engines and so forth are so complex as to be unintelligible to anyone other than a marine engineer. Unless one takes account of the hauling capacity of a beam trawler, its catching capacity cannot be measured adequately. What matters is not merely the size of a vessel but how hard it can plough its beam trawl through on its engine power.

I have great sympathy with the view that beam trawling is repugnant and should be banned as soon as possible. I hope that the Government will press—at least in the long term if they cannot achieve it immediately—for the total abandonment of beam trawling in Community waters. I accept that some species will be more difficult to catch without beam trawling but as there is no way to ensure effective policing by Community enforcement authorities or by national authorities I see no alternative to banning it altogether. I hope that the Minister will take that very seriously.

On the long-term joint North sea herring stock shared between Norway and the Community in areas IV A and IV B the Minister said that up to 60,900 tonnes could be caught, including swap arrangements with other areas. Again, may we have an assurance that these are not just paper fish and that that quantity of herring can actually be fished? Moreover, will it find a market at a price sufficient to recompense the fishermen for catching it so that this delicious, edible fish is not turned into fishmeal due to intervention prices? We have properly allowed for intervention, but in the past year there have been periods during which the landing price of herring was so low as not to recompense the fishermen. To increase the quota in those circumstances is an extraordinary exercise in marketing. If herring cannot be sold for human consumption, are the Government satisfied that there should be an increase in the quota and the minimum price?

Dr. Godman: I asked the Minister earlier whether he was satisfied with the performance of the Sea Fish Industry Authority in promoting commercial species, especially in view of the additional catches which may or may not exist. We all welcome the increased quotas, but in those circumstances the authority has a very important role in persuading the consumer to buy the fish at its real value.

Mr. Hughes: I agree entirely. The difficulty is that after 10 years without herring the housewife has lost the appetite for it and in many cases has never learnt the skill of cooking it. It is regrettable, but people do not know how to put the oatmeal around the herring to dry it out, so there are technical difficulties in persuading the consumer. The Sea Fish Industry Authority and other bodies certainly have a major promotional and educational role to play in convincing people of the excellence of herring. My point, however, is that giving an extra quota of herring to be turned into fishmeal has a distinctly distasteful element. The British people should be educated to enjoy herring as real fish rather than as bacon and eggs put through a pig and a hen.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) may wish to say something about the Manx fisheries. Are we satisfied with the arrangements for the policing and control of those fisheries? I appreciate that there are constitutional difficulties which it would not be appropriate to discuss today. Nevertheless, I have found that the size of kippers available on the Isle of Man is often considerably below the minimum size permitted for mainland herring catches. Is the Minister satisfied that catches of undersized herrings which would be illegal elsewhere in the United Kingdom are not being allowed on the Isle of Man?

As for the sole and plaice allocation in area VII, is the Minister satisfied that sufficient stock exists to be caught? I have been in touch with many ports on both sides of the southern Irish sea and many have stated that there is an absolute shortage of decent-sized sole and plaice in those waters. If the fish are not there to be caught, an increase in the quota means not real fish but phoney fish and a phoney deal.

The Minister referred to common enforcement and the inspectorate. It would be foolish to suggest that 1 April is a proper day to introduce standard logbooks. I regret to say that I still have little faith in the willingness of some of our Community partners to enforce the common fisheries policy with the rigour with which we have enforced it in this country. However much we welcome most of the proposals and however much we thank the Government on behalf of the British fishing industry, unless our industry can be assured that it is not being discriminated against as a result of differential enforcement regimes in different countries those thanks will have a hollow ring.

I urge the Government to come back to us as soon as there are more effective arrangements for the enforcement of total allowable catches and quotas so that all fishermen sailing from ports in these islands will know that they are being treated fairly and equally compared with their fellow fishermen from Belgium, Holland, France and Germany. At present, our fishermen still do not believe that that is the case. However much the House welcomes what has been achieved—I certainly would not wish to do other than assist the removal of the parliamentary reserve that the Minister properly put on—in another sense there must still be a parliamentary reserve in that we enforce the common policies whereas many of our colleagues do not—and that rankles throughout our fishing industry.

8.48 pm

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): There have been too many statesmanlike speeches from the Front Benches. The only point of comparison between my speech and those is that mine will be shorter.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on what has been achieved in establishing total allowable catches and quotas. Congratulations should go to the entire Council of Ministers, but there is no doubt that the contribution of those who are loosely described as the United Kingdom Fisheries Ministers has been substantial, and I was glad that the Opposition spokesman fully acknowleged that. The fact that the agreement has been reached in time for the start of the year is an achievement in itself.

All this bodes well for the future development of the common fisheries policy. I heard the president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, hot-foot from Brussels after the agreement was reached, speaking at a substantial function for fishermen in Fife. He certainly recognised what had been achieved, and I am glad to see from the federation's brief that in the sober light of a January day it still supports the conclusions expressed by Willie Hay in Fife in December.

The anxiety that I heard among the fishermen in my constituency was not about quotas or total allowable catches. Their present anxiety is because they are experiencing difficulty in finding the fish. This gives me a slight shiver of anxiety in that I do hope that the scientists are right in their estimates of what are appropriate total allowable catches. They have been wrong before and I hope that the catches being agreed are appropriate in the present situation with regard to conservation.

There is deep anxiety in the fishing community in the east of Scotland about the way in which the Community has allowed the bycatch on Norway pout fishing to grow from 10 to 18 per cent. It is a large percentage anyway, but it is a fishery which tends to be carried out, as industrial fishery is, in pretty large tonnages. The amount of good fish that can be picked up in that kind of bycatch is bound to have some significant effect in the overall determination of what is an appropriate amount of fish to be caught over any particular period.

I understand that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is planning an experimental voyage to prove its point that that amount of bycatch is too great. If that voyage proves the Federation's point, as it believes it will, I hope that my right hon. Friend will return to the question vigorously in due course in the Council of Ministers.

Dr. Godman: May I ask the hon. Gentleman how effective he thinks inspection is of these catches of, say, Norway pout, and how effective the inspectors can be in determining the level of the bycatch?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman raises a good question which I would be happy to leave as a rhetorical one for the moment, but I accept the point which he appears to make.

I wish next to draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the importance of achieving a sensible agreement between the European Community and Norway on a long-term

[Mr. Henderson]

share of the catches of herring. I was glad to hear him emphasise in opening the debate that we remain strongly of the view that what Norway was suggesting earlier is unacceptable, but I think it is important in the long term that agreement be reached. It is not sensible to have two separate ways of handling these matters. It is a common resource and I hope that with goodwill between Europe and Norway for the future we will have a better arrangement for the management of this fishery.

Lastly, on the question of the on-shore processing and distribution of fish, I think that much needs to be done. If I may make a constituency point, something needs to be done about Pitten Weem harbour where Fife regional council, which owns it, has blown hot and cold for some time about necessary improvements to the harbour and developments of it. Having stripped out its budget provision for the work, it has now reinstated the provision, and I hope that the Scottish Office will encourage it to continue to pursue such improvements. It is necessary for safety and it is necessary if East Nuek is to continue to play its historic role in contributing to the effectiveness of the fishing industry on the east coast of Scotland. I hope that, among other things, the Scottish Office will discuss with the council the appropriateness of promoting a provisional order so that when harbour works are agreed they can be embarked upon speedily.

It is in the way in which we distribute and sell fish ultimately that we ensure a prosperous fishing industry, and the arrangements which have been made in Brussels recently give more encouragement for the future than has existed for some time.

8.54 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is rare for those of us who usually gather on these Benches to praise Ministers rather than to bury them. I do not want to be quite as lavish in my praise as was my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes) because his lavish praise makes my somewhat cooler offerings seem churlish by comparison, but I think that a certain amount of cool praise is appropriate in the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to these documents. This is the first debate in my recollection in which I do not feel totally justified in adopting a wholly hostile reaction to EEC documents. This is for two prime reasons.

As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson), this is an agreement for the year ahead which was settled in December of the previous year. That in itself is an achievement. It would seem that Irish logic applied to the EEC produces sense, and that is what we have in an agreement made in advance. These catches and our share of them hold out a better prospect for the industry in the year ahead. It is therefore right to give credit for that to Ministers. Too much praise might go to their heads too quickly and it is such an unusual event that we do not want to repeat it. However, in my view, it has been particularly difficult for the present incumbents in the Department to follow their predecessors whose team was essentially a public relations act rather than an act of real achievement — Ministers who got the glory and then moved on, leaving the present incumbents to tidy up the situation and to clear up the undoubted difficulties which in this instance I think have been successfully cleared up. I do not want to go further because the praise would go to their heads, so I will praise with faint damns from this point onwards.

We have to recognise that this is an improvement from a very bad position, and a particularly bad position in Grimsby where the fishing industry and its catches reached depths last year that we do not wish to plumb again this year. That is why it is so important to have these documents presented to us. The industry has been hanging on by its fingertips and the improvement has been achieved from a very bad position.

These are quotas that we would have regarded and rejected as inadequate three to four years ago in the negotiations then taking place for what we thought, and still think, are Britain's rights. They are certainly far smaller than we would have achieved had we been in the stronger position of being able to control our own destinies and our own fishing grounds. They must be viewed in that context. Improvement is not a compensation for the harm that has been done to the industry over the past few years. However, the improvement is welcome. The improvement in the cod quota is particularly welcome for Grimsby because we are a cod port. It is particularly welcome for the British United Trawlers vessels in Grimsby and for the pair of fishers whose cod catches are much bigger than the rest and are crucial to our port. Our catches were substantially down last year and the British United Trawlers vessels were laid up for six weeks and resumed fishing only when they had a new allocation from the sectoral quota. They will be hard pushed, even now, not to catch what they are allocated but to catch economically at these levels. The improvement is still welcome for all that.

But even this improvement in the quotas other than for cod is achieved at some cost. The cod quota increase and the total allowable catch increase seem, on the evidence, justified, as there is undoubtedly a greater stock abundance. There was a good year class in 1979 and the new catches seem realistic. But the others are more doubtful. In the EEC, where everything is politicised and where it becomes a game of trying to increase the catches to keep everybody happy, I wonder whether the scientists are not being put under some pressure as a result, and whether political fish are not being created in order to satisfy the demands put on the stocks.

In particular, I wonder whether the increase in plaice is due to Dutch pressure to be allowed to take legally what they have been taking illegally until now in excess of their allowances. I also wonder whether the whiting improvement is a way of sweetening a disastrous decision to increase the Danish bycatches. The increase in bycatches was cut from 20 per cent. to 18 per cent. and the Minister may think that he fought a good fight, but I believe that we should have refused to accept any increase. The increase from 10 per cent. to 18 per cent. in bycatches was wrong on whatever terms, and is generally regarded as such. It was a straightforward political decision, and it means that an inviolate part of an agreed collective package has been unravelled for the convenience of one member state.

Dr. Godman: Am I not right in thinking that this derogation concerning the increase in the bycatch allowed to Danish fishermen fishing for Norway pout ends on 31 May 1985? Perhaps we should be seeking an assurance from the Minister that that increase will not be continued.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right and has taken the words out of my mouth. Even though the increase has been reduced from 20 per cent. to 18 per cent., we want an assurance from the Minister that it will not be maintained. It is a question of British national interest not to allow that increase in Danish bycatches. Even if we overruled and it was deemed not to be a question of national interest, our moral position in refusing to accept an increase from 10 per cent. is strong. The Danish case is opportunitistic to say the least. If the increase is sustained, the Danes will get away with it once again. That is the essence of what has happened.

While I am talking about the iniquities of Denmark, perhaps I can seek an assurance from the Minister. His predecessor assured us that the 2,000 tonnes of cod that the Danes were deliberately given over their total allowable catch for three years only would cease at the end of next year. Will the hon. Gentleman repeat that assurance?

Welcome as it is, there are problems with the settlement. The first problem is that of political fish. The second is that the policing system is still not adequate. The long-delayed log books are at last coming into being, although to some ridicule from the industry, which says that 1 April is an appropriate date. But it must realise that the log books are an essential part of any policing system. However, they must be combined with an adequate Common Market force for policing and an adequate system for penalising those who catch more than their allocations. What has happened with the Germans and the North sea saithe—it was their over-fishing that led to the closure of the joint stocks, to the fury of the French —shows the need for some sanction to stop that going on. The same thing has happened with the Dutch and the mackerel. There has not been, and there does not seem to be, an effective punishment.

If the system is to operate properly and the allocations are to be respected, and if we, who are not necessarily the most law-abiding but are the best policed fishing industry in the Common Market, are to have faith in the system, we must have an assurance that transgressions will be penalised.

The negotiations with Spain are hanging over the industry. Spain has a massive fishing fleet that would be introduced to the Common Market and would compete with the fishing effort which is already too large for the available stocks. That represents a danger from which no transitional arrangements can adequately protect Britain in particular and Common Market fishing in general.

It seems that there may be an eight-year derogation with negotiations for a further two years, and the possibility of a further five-year derogation, if those negotiations do not succeed. In other words, the Spanish fleet may be held back for 15 years. At the end of that period the principle of access to the common fisheries stocks, which was developed essentially by other member states to get their fishing vessels into British fishing grounds, will be used by the Spanish against the entire Common Market, especially against France.

Fifteen years is a short time in fishing, especially when one considers that stocks are already threatened by the massive fishing effort. At the end of that period there will be a threat to both the United Kingdom and the entire EC fishing effort. However, there is a more immediate problem. Will the Minister tell the House what is proposed in respect of disguised or flag of convenience fishing? The Spaniards have already begun to use that. When Spain joins the EEC, we shall no longer have the protection of the requirement for 70 per cent. of crews in Spanish vessels which register in Britain to be EEC members because Spain will be an EEC member. That requirement is not being adequately enforced now, and when Spain joins the EEC it will be eliminated totally.

Because of unemployment in the fishing industry, a large number of skippers and crew members who know our grounds will be only too anxious to take jobs on Spanish vessels which will be free to register under a flag of convenience and to take advantage of British quotas by registering as British vessels. Therefore, what transitional arrangements will apply in respect of Spanish vessels registering in Britain when the 70 per cent. EEC requirement is no longer valid? What safeguards does the Minister propose?

The Spanish negotiations are being handled almost entirely by the Foreign Office. What input has MAFF into those negotiations? It seems that the Foreign Office is handling the negotiations in a closed and secretive fashion. As a representative of a fishing port and as someone who is not 100 per cent. enthusiastic about the Common Market, I am always suspicious of the Foreign Office handling negotiations that affect a vital national interest, which it can discount because of its Euro-enthusiasm, as, indeed, it discounted British fishing interests in the original entry negotiations.

To what extent is MAFF being consulted, and to what extent is the industry being consulted? What recognition is given to the industry's views in the negotiations? If the negotiations are handled by the Foreign Office without effective consultations with the industry, we have a formula for a further betrayal of our fishing industry.

In those circumstances, I am not prepared to welcome Spain to the joys of EEC membership — it has had ruinous consequences for Britain. We should use these negotiations to maintain an intransigent position to achieve better concessions and a firmer and more tolerable deal for our fishermen in the face of the threat from that massive fishing fleet.

My final point concerns only Grimsby. The fishing industry there has had a difficult and dangerous year, as I am sure the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) would agree. It has hung on by its fingertips. It is crucial to keep the industry going, and I believe that we have achieved that. The danger of the landing company collapsing has been averted, although I should have preferred the landing company to have been run by a co-operative of merchants, owners, lumpers and the town, so that all interests were integrated. However, we can still work towards that development. The important thing is that the landing company is still in operation and there is no danger of the port being closed.

The danger was averted by carrying out some drastic surgery. The lumper landing force, which used to be 123, has been reduced to 60. The remaining men have made a magnificent effort and have worked extremely hard to make the new system work. No vessel has been turned away, and there are far better prospects for the port, but the costs at Grimsby are still high. Associated British Ports has a major role to play in helping to reduce those costs. Grimsby dock charges represent 5 per cent. of grossings, whereas in Peterhead the figure is only 2 per cent. Grimsby's landing costs represent 9 per cent. of grossings, whereas at Cuxhaven the figure is about 4 per cent.

[Mr. Mitchell]

The integrated developments operations study which has just become available to Humberside Members was commissioned by the county council from Graham Moss Associates. It states:

"The National Dock Labour Board scheme is one reason for these high costs, but cost allocation by Associated British Ports is one of equal if not more importance."

It adds that Associated British Ports is somewhat removed from the industry, and suggests that the company could write off all or part of the outstanding loan repayments presently levied on the port as a means of reducing the costs and helping to sustain the port's efforts to fight back.

The real threat to Grimsby lies in the problem of the British United Trawlers CAT class vessels. Although rather elderly, they are the last big, year-round vessels in Grimsby, and their catches are essential to keep the port going in winter and to provide the bulk catch which the seiner fleet cannot provide. These vessels were fishing profitably at the end of 1984, but their financial position is difficult and their fate is continually under review. It is being reviewed by the main board in London, but its perspectives are different from those in Grimsby. In London, the interests of a fishing port and the industry may not be as important as they are in Grimsby. Our nightmare, which is repeated month by month, if not week by week, is that that company will accept decommissioning grants for those vessels. It may take them out of fishing or lay them up. Lay-up would be a serious problem—almost a disaster—for Grimsby.

This matter is urgent because the terms of EEC aid to the fishing industry mean that those vessels do not qualify for FEOGA help for replacement or renewal. The cut-off point is 33 m, which is just more than 100 ft. Those vessels are 130 ft long—too big to qualify for FEOGA grants for the reconstruction or renovation that would allow them to continue fishing. They qualify for the 25 per cent. White Fish Authority grant, but they cannot obtain the further 25 per cent. FEOGA grant either for rebuilding or for refurbishment and modernisation. Unless some special inducement is held out to the firm to persuade it to rebuild those vessels, the decision will be taken on the strictly economic grounds of what will benefit the shareholders. That being so, the vessels are likely to be decommissioned while grants last—or taken off fishing. They would be difficult to replace even if they qualified for the FEOGA grant as well as the White Fish Authority grant. The vessels would cost £1·3 million to £1·5 million to replace. They are hugely expensive. However, fishing needs all-purpose vessels—CAT class or smaller—to enable us to fish all year round and to provide the basic cash to sustain the market and to pay the charges to keep the port going.

Without help additional to that currently provided, it is difficult to see how those vessels can be kept going or replaced. They are the linchpin of fishing in Grimsby, and they are threatened. The Minister should consider that problem. It is crucially important to concentrate the industry at focal points such as Grimsby where there is a concentration of facilities—not only the market but the ice, the engineering and the tradition of going to sea. To maintain that concentration, we need vessels such as the CAT class vessels. Yet the present financial arrangements do not permit us either to extend the life of those vessels or to replace them if they are decommissioned. That cannot be done because the EEC grant is not available. The only alternative is some national supplement to the White Fish Authority grant.

The problem is urgent. The fate of the industry is decided from week to week and from month to month. Without a solution to this problem, all the Minister's efforts to win for us improved quotas and catches will be in vain in Grimsby. Without those vessels, the industry in Grimsby will fall back into the old trap of escalating costs pressing on a shrinking fleet. That is a formula for economic disaster, but it may well become a reality if the flagships of the fleet are knocked out.

When strict economics and the needs of fishing pull in different directions, as in this case, it is crucial that we remember that this is an interim period. The long-term prospects for fishing are good. Investment decisions will look very different in three, four or five years time, when catches and market returns are better. It is crucial that we should be enabled to survive until decisions can be taken in a more optimistic climate. Survival means help for the maintenance of the CAT class vessels in Grimsby until they can inherit better times. Without them, we shall hardly have a viable fishing industry to inherit those better times. That is the quandary of Grimsby. To a lesser extent, it is the quandary of fishing in general. The Minister has a responsibility not only to offer us better quotas—as he has done—but to help us to survive to inherit the better times that I hope lie ahead.

9.18 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am grateful for your kindness, Mr. Speaker, in calling me twice today. I realise that I am pushing my luck. I do so on the grounds that, just as milk production is of vital importance to my constituency, fishing is still a major industry there, too, especially in the port of Newlyn.

I welcome the optimism with which the House looks forward to the future of the industry. I wish that I could share it. I fully appreciate the achievements that have been made on the administrative side, especially in the Commission and the Council of Ministers. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has played a major part in that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) reminded us, there is an absence of fish in many areas. My right hon. Friend referred to sole, especially in the Bristol channel. The shrinkage of the stock there is deeply worrying. My right hon. Friend also referred to the beam trawling activities of the Brixham fleet. I have watched the build-up of the Brixham beaming fleet with some anxiety. I wonder whether it has something to do with our old friend the flag of convenience. I wonder how many of the beamers that proudly sail from Brixham are in sole British ownership. That brings me to what is known as quota fishing—member states finding more ways in which to transfer shipping to other nations in the Community so that they gain access to that country's quotas.

In regard to flags of convenience, I fully share the apprehension of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about Spain. It has recently developed the practice of flags of convenience, which practice has been swept out to sea by the legislation to which the hon. Gentleman referred, which lays down manning requirements. As he said, that legislation's effects will be swept away when Spain joins the European Community. People

in Cornwall are worried that the Government might have had second thoughts about amending the requirements on the registration of fishing boats as a means of tightening up the law to stop flag of convenience fishing. I urge my right hon. Friend to examine this matter carefully with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport with a view to the provisions of the merchant shipping Bill which is to be presented to the House.

My main worry is about Spain and its accession to the Community. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby said, that poses an enourmous threat to our fishing fleet, nowhere greater than in my part of the world as I represent the constituency that is nearest to Spain. One has only to go off Lands End or around the Isles of Scilly to see Spanish boats fishing unlicensed. My right hon. Friend referred to the continuation of the interim agreement with Spain which allows that. I remember, however, an incident at the end of last year when a Spanish trawler which was fishing illegally off the Irish coast was sunk. We all know that Spanish vessels, whether licensed or unlicensed chance their arms and go in for illegal fishing. My plea to my right hon. Friend is to ensure that our vigilance in regard to illegal fishing is not lessened. I draw his attention to the vital importance of the Nimrod flights which monitor the activities of the Spanish fleet and try to weed out the boats which are fishing illegally.

Enforcement has been referred to by many hon. Members. Like them I am far from satisfied by the international community effort of the inspectorate. It made a good start. There have been gratifying results of its activities certainly in regard to Dutch overfishing. I thoroughly applaud what it is doing. As has been said on many occasions in the past in the House, that force is woefully inadequate in numbers to carry out the task which has been put on it by the Council of Ministers. The number of Community inspectors must be increased. Until there is a genuine attempt to apply the conservation measures there will be not just dissatisfaction but real anger among our fishermen.

9.26 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am glad to have the opportunity to debate these Community documents on fishery development and the common fisheries policy. I particularly welcome the fact that in a debate on 10 January we are able to discuss the total allowable catches which have already been agreed for 1985. They have been widely acknowledged as favourable for the industry. Therefore, it would be churlish of me not to give credit to the Minister, to his junior Minister, Lord Gray in the Scottish Office and to their European colleagues for having managed to get the TACs in place in time.

We should not go overboard in our praise for getting the common fisheries policy to work, as it was always intended that it should work. If possible, at the beginning of the fishing year the industry should know where it stands. It is a mark of the uncertainties that have dogged the industry over many years that it is with a sense of disbelief that we find that the policy works. That is why it is an occasion for mutual backslapping. Nevertheless, the industry is grateful for the work that has been done. That has been acknowledged and I join in the acknowledgment.

As the Minister said, not everything has yet been settled. Perhaps most importantly, there remains the vexed question of agreement between the Community and Norway about the share-out of North Sea herring. There was great relief throughout the industry that no concession was made to the excessive Norwegian demands during the latter part of 1984. The industry has made well known its outright opposition to Norway's demands. The industry and Opposition Members are grateful for the fact that the Government have taken a firm stand. As the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes) said, they led the way in taking a firm stand. We would encourage them to continue doing so if Norway persists in making extravagant claims.

Equally, the interim arrangements form no basis for a long-term solution. The fear must be that Norway will take out of its own sector a substantial amount of fish which, when taken with what comes out of the Community sector, will not be in the best long-term interests of conservation of the species. It was recognised in the record of the meeting on 13 December, which is attached to the explanatory memorandum of 21 December, that the parties would have to agree to discuss the matter further in 1985. The Minister has said fairly that the parties are far apart. My request would be that the discussions take place at the earliest possible date and that the matter is not left until the tail end of the year without agreement. There was some surprise within the industry that Norway did not use the bargaining counters which many people thought she would use with regard to the other species on which agreement had to be reached. We may speculate about why that was not done in 1984. However, an early start to the discussions on a long-term agreement for the herring share-out is important lest at the tail end of the year when a further agreement on other white fish species has to be reached, that bargaining counter is again put in Norway's hands.

Mr. Jopling: I should like to pin the hon. Gentleman down on what he has just said. Does he not agree that no agreement was better than a bad agreement?

Mr. Wallace: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not hear me, but I said at the beginning of my remarks that we are relieved that there was no agreement rather than a bad agreement. It is accepted on all sides that at some stage there must be an agreement, and the sooner we discuss the terms, the better. I do not dispute the fact that no agreement on the terms proposed by Norway was better than proceeding on that basis.

The Minister could not give an assurance that there would be no premature stoppage in the future when some countries had not fished their full quota. That will cause great concern within the industry. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, enforcement is one way of tackling that problem. If it can be proved that some countries have offended, unless there are penalties which can be enforced, there will be a danger that the whole common fisheries policy agreement will become unstitched. What will happen if it is established that a country has overfished a particular species, thereby depriving another country of fishing its full quota? The Minister did not say whether in the following year there would be a reallocation to deal with such a misdemeanour. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will say something about that in his reply.

In relation to TACs, I wish specifically to refer to the sprat fishery and the closures proposed on the Firth of

[Mr. Wallace]

Forth and the Moray firth. These matters are important to the communities affected. When this was raised in an amendment tabled by my hon. Friends in a similar debate on 7 December 1983—we proposed that there should be an exemption from the prohibition for boats under 40 ft in length—the Minister said that he would consider that proposal in the ensuing year in the light of scientific advice. What scientific advice was made available to him?

The Government have been properly congratulated on getting TACs in place, but it is a matter of regret that we did not discuss what happened at the Council of Ministers in September. The hon. Members for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) and for Great Grimsby have already referred to the increase in the bycatch of fish for human consumption within the Norway pout fishery from 10 per cent. to 18 per cent. That caused great resentment throughout the industry. Although the four months that have passed have allowed passions to cool, it is important to put on record the outrage and sense of betrayal which was marked by a dignified walk-out on the Minister of State by the representatives of the fishing industry who attended the Council meeting in Brussels.

Many of them felt that when the common fisheries policy was negotiated in January 1983, it contained many compromises and concessions. It was accepted by the industry, although one could scarcely say that it was welcomed. Indeed, many fishermen in my own constituency did not accept it. The agreement on the size of the pout box and bycatch was an important and significant aspect of the final deal. When it appeared that the Danes had sought to unstitch that particular and important aspect of the common fisheries policy and had succeeded in doing so, it was not surprising that there was such an outcry from the industry.

In my own constituency there is particular anger and fear that, because one of the more attractive areas for the Norway pout fishery is to the north-east of Unst the increased bycatch will, within a very short space of time, have an adverse effect upon the white fish stocks in an important fishing ground for the Shetland fleet. It has already been said with regard to the herring fishery that above all else we should be considering fishing for human consumption. It is important to note that we are putting in danger fishing for human consumption in order to promote industrial fishing by the Danes.

I am grateful to the Minister for the correspondence he has had with me. As has already been said, the percentage increase will apply only until 31 May. Tonight I should like to have an assurance from the Treasury bench that the Government will resist any extension of that increase beyond 31 May. It has already been said by the hon. Member for Fife, North-East that between now and the expiry of the experiment Scottish fishermen will be monitoring the situation. As well as scientific advice, I am sure that they will take into account the results of the monitoring exercise to be carried out by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

I should also like to know whether the Minister believes, as has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that this is a matter of national importance to an important industry. Would the Minister be prepared to invoke the Luxembourg compromise? Indeed, is he able to say whether he can invoke it? In the briefing note from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to which reference has already been made, concern is expressed by the federation, based upon an interpretation of the Luxembourg compromise which it received from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Scotland, that this is an area where the Luxembourg compromise may not be able to be invoked. We should welcome the Minister's clarification of this point.

With regard to beam trawling and the regulations which are before us, I share the views of those hon. Members who have already said that beam trawling is unacceptable. It ruins the seabed and disrupts the food chain. We note that the Government are not entirely satisfied about the efficiency of the proposals and that they will seek to improve them. I recall that beam trawling was the subject of discussion when the inshore fisheries legislation relating to Scotland was before the House during the last session. Under that legislation the Government have the power to ban beam trawling within six miles of the Scottish coast. As the Minister who is to reply is a Scottish Office Minister, he may be able to indicate whether the Government intend at an early stage to ban beam trawling within six miles of the Scottish coast.

On Spanish entry, I do not wish to add to the pertinent points that have been made by the hon. Members for Great Grimsby and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). I shall look forward to the Minister's answers to those points. It is important that we should extend the Community and underpin democracy in Spain. However, we must not neglect the important fisheries aspect. That aspect was neglected when the United Kingdom entered the Community in 1973. We shall wish to give the closest attention to the particular arrangements which are made for the fishing industry.

Finally, I turn to a constituency point with regard to a possible amendment of the common fisheries policy. The preamble to the common fisheries policy, dated 25 January 1983, referred to the need to

"safeguard the particular needs of regions where local populations are especially dependent on fisheries and related industries."

Article VII of that agreement set up the Orkney and Shetland or north of Scotland box to carry out the hope expressed in the preamble to safeguard the particular needs of that area.

There is restrictive licensing on vessels over 26 m in length which are fishing commercial species. France has allocated 52 licences, the United Kingdom 62, Germany 12 and Belgium 2. In a recent reply that I received, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay) said that in the six months from April to October last year the total number of vessels from France was 57, from the United Kingdom 31, and from Belgium 2.

Quite apart from not controlling vessels under 26 m in length it has been maintained by the fishermen in Orkney and Shetland that, as a measure to give protection to a sensitive region, the number of licences was too high. That opinion, expressed at the time when the common fisheries policy was agreed, seems to have been borne out by the fact that we find that what the scheme allows is in excess of the actual level of fishing. Therefore, what is meant to be a protective licensing scheme in fact permits a greater level of fishing than has been taking place. Will the Government consider that matter again in the light of their experience and see what steps can be taken to reduce the number of licences in that area?

The fishing industry, often in peripheral parts of the country, provides an important part of the economic structure or backbone of the Community. Therefore, it is in all our interests that the fishing industry should thrive. We welcome the steps that have been taken to get certainty in the industry through the increase in TACs and through their being in place. However, several points still cause great concern and we should appreciate the Government's attention to them.

9.40 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): It is a great pleasure to speak in a debate where there is a virtual unanimity of view. I, too, want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the tremendous work that they have done to bring before the House the excellent TACs.

I do not want to speak at great length or in great detail. Obviously, the health and welfare of the fishing industry of Great Grimsby has a great impact on my constituency. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has a far more detailed knowledge of the fishing industry in his constituency than I have, but I thought that he was a tiny bit churlish in what he had to say earlier. I know that he is deeply concerned about the tremendous problems, which I acknowledge exist in his constituency. I would be the first to recognise that the past year has been difficult for the fishing industry in his constituency. But my right hon. Friend is entitled to three unequivocal cheers for the TACs. Although the hon. Gentleman was unable to give my right hon. Friend those three cheers, his local paper was. It said:

"Grimsby welcomes deal. Bumper fishing catch!"

There is no doubt about the view of the local people in our area.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman may not have recognised the strangled cry that emitted from my lips at the beginning of my speech. It was one cheer.

Mr. Brown: In that case, the hon. Gentleman is not representing clearly the view of his constituents that appears in that headline. However, I take the point that he makes.

The fact is, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, that the new quota arrangements will be beneficial to the BUT fleet, which I know has been anxious over the past two or three years about the long-term future. Mr. Nigel Atkins, the representative of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations based in Grimsby said:

"This is certainly a favourable deal . . . Quotas are high enough to cause us no problems."

It should be placed on record that the representative of Grimsby's seine fleet has also said that the deal gives owners a much greater freedom to operate their fleets.

Therefore, it is important for us to recognise what has been achieved. I, like the hon. Member for Grimsby, am no friend of the EEC and I was sceptical about what the common fisheries policy could achieve. I submit that it is not necessarily the common fisheries policy which is responsible for the excellent arrangements that are being placed before us for consideration today, but that that has much more to do with the negotiating skill of my right hon. and hon. Friends. It also has to do with a desire to reach a consensus on the part of the Council of Ministers, and, indeed, the European Commission. It is not very often that one finds the desire to obtain an agreement. It does not have much to do with the common fisheries policy. It has much more to do with the desire and the will to make an arrangement that meets the approval of the fishing industry, not only in this country but in other countries in the Community.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby spoke of other problems that beset the fishing industry in south Humberside. He referred to the problem of high port charges. I appreciate that that falls outside the responsibility of Ministers in this debate. I mention it only because we have constantly pressed the Government on the issue, particularly in regard to the lumper force. I place on record the tremendous co-operation that came from the lumpers when the Grimsby fishing industry had to take a difficult decision over the landing company there. I am the second in the House tonight to acknowledge that the lumpers have co-operated tremendously in trying to ensure that there is a company so that fish can be landed in the port of Grimsby.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) spoke in an intervention about the role of the Sea Fish Industry Authority in the long term. I was privileged to attend a presentation by the authority shortly before Christmas and was greatly encouraged by the way in which it recognises that it has a responsibility to ensure that the marketing side of its operations are taken fully into account.

In that connection, I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Hughes), who said that it was important to have a campaign to ensure that the British housewife consumes more fish, and he was referring particularly to herring. I have great respect for the Sea Fish Industry Authority, which acknowledges that it has much to do on the marketing side.

Some difficult decisions will have to be taken by ports such as Grimsby in relation to modernisation. The Sea Fish Industry Authority is concerned to ensure that we in Britain have the same port facilities as exist on the other side of the North sea. About a year ago the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and I were privileged to visit the ports of Esbjerg and Thyboron in Denmark, where we were impressed by and envious of the investment that has taken place in the infrastructure there. We should like to see such developments taking place in our ports, and I am sure that the Sea Fish Industry Authority is aware of the need to encourage port modernisation.

Viewing the situation facing Great Grimsby from the perspective of Cleethorpes — or perhaps I should say from the pier at Cleethorpes—I am far more optimistic about the future than I was a year ago. That is due in large measure to the skill and patience of my right hon. and hon. Friends, to whom I pay tribute for what they have done to give 1985 a good start for the south Humberside fishing industry. Despite other problems, we look to the future with some optimism. Optimism breeds confidence and confidence breeds success. The TACs that have been negotiated can breed the confidence for the future for which we have been looking.

9.49 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I am delighted to take part in the debate, because it will give me the opportunity of putting to the House some of the

[Mr. Stuart Randall]

problems that the fishing industry in Hull faces, and to discuss the effect that these new quotas will have on the fishing industry in Hull.

A number of hon. Members have complimented the Minister on arriving at the TACs early on, and that is a good thing; so I, too, compliment the Minister. It must be good for the industry to know where it stands in terms of its catches, as that enables the industry to plan its future with more certainty. Tomorrow, I shall be having a meeting in Hull, and I shall visit the Hull docks. The people down there will ask me what this will mean to Hull in terms of jobs in the port and of retaining the processing and distribution industry in Hull, and the answer is that I do not know.

The morass of detail of these reports is quite impossible to interpret at a glance. I stand back from this, as I am rather bemused by the detail, and am therefore unaware what the effect will be. However, a report has come out, which I received a few minutes before coming into the Chamber. I hope that this report will provide the turning point for the port of Hull to go from the tremendous decline of the past 10 or 15 years to regeneration.

The decline of the port has emanated from the loss of fishing opportunity in the Icelandic waters, through the cod war, and from the common fisheries policy. We now have a male unemployment rate of over 20 per cent., which is a serious problem. The catching industry has been devastated, although the processing and distribution industry is strong and thriving.

I can give some figures to show the scale of the devastation. In 1970 we used to land about 140,000 tonnes in Hull, and that is now down to 8,000 tonnes, much of which is Icelandic container traffic, which brings in a lot of the fish. To bring in the 140,000 tonnes, we had about 120 large vessels, freezers and large trawlers; and that figure is down to 3. It is the effect of having all one's eggs in one basket, and when the Icelandic problems arose and the common fisheries policy started to evolve, we had the wrong kind of capacity to exploit the existing opportunities. Therefore, the quotas are crucial, as are vessel licences.

We have reached the trough in this decline. I fervently hope and, although I am not over-optimistic, believe, that we are at the point from which the port of Hull can start to revive. The formation of the Hull Fishing Landing Company recently is a great example of the way in which local authorities, the industry and the workers can get together to preserve their industry, in this case fish catching. In addition to the loss of much of the catching fleet, we have lost the Torry research station and there have been substantial cuts in the college of higher education courses in fishing. There has been a serious decline.

In Hull, people feel bitter about the way in which the owners of the vessels have received compensation for the loss of fishing opportunity, whereas the people who work in the industry have, to all intents and purposes, received nothing. Since I have been in the House, my attempts to persuade Ministers in both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Employment to get something done to give these men, who have served the industry and their country so well, both in the last war and in the Falklands conflict, something for what they have done, have got nowhere.

I sent the Under-Secretary of State for Employment —the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley)—a list of the members of the British Fishermen's Association. The hon. Gentleman commented in the letter he sent back to me on the length of service of those men. The list showed that men who have spent 30, 40 or 45 years in the industry have not received any compensation. Is that the way to treat people who have worked in the industry for so long? I hope that the Minister will take an initiative and will press the Community to devise a financial scheme of income guarantees for redundant fishermen. That should not be done by adding levies per tonne of fish landed, because that would be the wrong way to go about it. Will the Minister get together with his colleagues in other Departments on this initiative?

Will the Minister investigate the possibility of providing a common state retirement pension policy for all fishermen at the age of 55? Fishing is one of the most dangerous industries in which to work. It is far more dangerous than the mining industry in terms of deaths and serious accidents. It is wrong to force men at the age of 55 to go to sea. Essentially, I am asking for the people who worked in this industry for so long to receive levels of compensation similar to those received by those who have worked in, for example, the steel industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who is no longer in the Chamber, said in a speech on European Community budgets:

> "A brother of mine was given the princely sum of £385 by his firm after 19 years of service with it. The firm received £400 per gross registered tonne for each vessel that it decommissioned." —[*Official Report*, 11 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 978.]

It seems that the Minister, the Government and the European Community believe that one gross registered tonne is more important than a man who has served the industry for 19 years. Many hon. Members, especially Opposition Members, have pressed the Government to introduce some form of compensation. My hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) have introduced private Member's Bills on this subject. While I am a Member I shall press the Government continually to come up with some compensation for these men. They deserve compensation, and I believe that it is reasonable to demand it. At the moment those men are thrown on the scrap heap in the most despicable way. I am resentful of the Government for dealing with the matter in this fashion.

I congratulate the Humberside county council and the Hull city council in particular on the way in which they have taken the initiative to regenerate the industry in Hull and to ensure that the Hull and Humberside integration development operation study was commissioned. The study attempts to regenerate the regional economy and to create jobs. In brief, it proposes that there should be some additional catching capacity and a middle-water fleet, although not a large one—it will clearly never be so great as that which we had in the heyday of deep sea fishing from Hull — to support the processing and distribution industries in the area.

In addition, the study refers to the development of the dock area. Only a few months ago, Associated British Ports threatened to close the dock area, claiming that it was losing about £500,000 per annum, but negotiations between that organisation and the city and county councils now seem to be bearing fruit. It is perhaps too early to be

wisure, but we hope to come up with a fundable proposition. We envisage that the area will also be used for tourism and for industrial and housing development, all of which will provide a total revenue stream to make the dock area viable as we can no longer rely on big fishing catches to fund the port as we did in the old days.

If the Minister has seen the report, does he intend to back it; and how many jobs and what catching capacity are likely to ensue? If he has not yet seen the report, perhaps he will answer those questions in writing.

Mr. Henderson: It would be interesting to know who commissioned the report.

Mr. Randall: It was funded by the EEC and carried out by consultants, Graham Moss Associates. The aim was to see how we could tap into the the various EEC funds. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the European funding systems are extremely difficult to understand — that is why the report was needed — but we now have a blueprint on which we hope to build in the near future.

A study of that kind needs money. I understand that the Community has allocated £21 million for regional budgets for compensation for loss of fishing industries, of which about £8 million has been allocated to the Hull area. The Euro-Member for Humberside is on record in the local press as saying that that £8 million has now been allocated. Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether that is true and exactly what the position is.

The accession of Spain is a source of considerable worry in view of the practices of Spanish vessels in our waters, especially the illegal fishing reported to me by our fishermen and the appalling conditions on board the Spanish vessels. It is not just a matter of crews going to sea without food or toilet facilities — we are talking about vessels without logs or safety equipment and utterly unacceptable conditions.

I will not add to the other points that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) made. Nevertheless, the Spanish influence worries me. I greatly hope that the Government will take that up and that they will ensure that such practices cease. I also hope that we will provide reasonable conditions in which our seamen can work.

10.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): As we have come to expect on such occasions, this has been a most interesting and, I might say, wide-ranging debate on the various Community documents relating to fishing being considered by the House tonight. The knowledgeable contributions made by hon. Members amply reflect the importance of the fishing industry to the many parts of the country that they represent.

Mr. Mark Hughes: Who is the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. MacKay: I think that my constituency probably has many more fish swimming round it than that of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Hughes). I say that in reply to his sedentary intervention.

It is particularly gratifying to be able to take part in a debate on the fishing industry during which there has been such broad recognition of the highly satisfactory nature of the arrangements that we have been able to negotiate for 1985. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) spoke almost glowingly about our efforts, but I thought that his speech was to a certain extent dwarfed by some of the remarks of Opposition Members. I refer, in particular, to the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). I even noted that towards the end of his speech the hon. Member for Great Grimsby appealed to British United Trawlers to look at the long term. He said that the long-term prospects for fishing were good. I think that there has been a fair measure of agreement about that tonight. There has certainly been a fair measure of agreement about the fact that that situation has been brought about by the successful negotiations carried out in the Community by my right hon. and hon. Friends, not only this year but during the past few years.

The arrangements have been warmly welcomed not only by the House but by the industry. I have said before when concluding fishery debates that our task now is to keep the common fisheries policy in good shape, so that fishermen may plan ahead with some confidence. Of course, improvements can always be made, and I hope that in 1985 we can consolidate the progress already made and concentrate on ensuring that the industry makes the most of its fishing opportunities.

In particular, I should like to highlight the useful experience gained in 1984 in developing quota management arrangements. Unlike certain other parties, our philosophy is that business men know best how to run their own affairs. More than most industries, the fishing industry has to learn to live with the consequences of actions taken by the European Commission and by the Council of Ministers.

We regularly consult the industry before decisions are taken on quota arrangements. At a domestic level it is right that the industry should play a greater role in organising its fishing patterns so as to meet market demands. The better prospects for the major stocks have allowed us to negotiate quotas that should facilitate the broader introduction of sectoral quotas, which allow the fishing organisations to assume day-to-day responsibility for the management of their members' quotas. In that way the industry can be given the best chance to meet the needs of the market and of the fishermen.

The hon. Member for City of Durham mentioned a number of points on the same theme when he expressed the hope that, in particular, the extra herring that we caught would find a ready market among consumers. I am sure that the whole House agrees with that. I just hope that we can perhaps pass on a message to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Irving) that he should put herring on the menu in the various cafeterias in the House — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps he could ensure that it appears on the menu even more often than at present, although it appears pleasantly often. I recommend that my right hon. and hon. Friends sample it.

Among others, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes mentioned the Sea Fish Industry Authority. We have to look to that authority to encourage the British housewife to eat more fish, particularly herring. On 17 December the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), announced that the European Commission had given its approval to more than three quarters of the authority's development programme. This has enabled the authority to press ahead with its campaign to improve the marketing of fish in the United Kingdom for which the Government have pledged £7·9 million towards the authority's proposed spending of

[Mr. MacKay]

over £14 million in the first three years. The authority is well aware of the problems of herring and is putting a special emphasis on marketing herring so that the housewife will go back to making herring part of the British diet.

It is difficult to be logical in a wind-up speech covering the wide range of issues that were raised and I will apologise in advance for the fact that on this occasion, to the surprise of all Opposition Members, I will be less logical than I usually am.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West all mentioned the problems of Spanish accession. We are very conscious of the size of the Spanish fleet and the potential impact that the uncontrolled upsurge of Spanish efforts after accession could have on the fishing industry in the United Kingdom. That is why we have pressed hard and long for satisfactory arrangements to be secured in the current enlargement negotiations. The agreed Community position endorsed by Heads of Government at the European Council meeting on 3 and 4 December 1984 was very satisfactory from our point of view. Negotiations are proceeding with speed. For obvious reasons, I cannot be too explicit with the House about the details of the Community position, but I can assure hon. Members that it fully safeguards the interests of the United Kingdom.

I deal next with another question which exercised a number of hon. Members—the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives, my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the question of Norway pout. I am well aware of the industry's concern over the decision to increase the bycatch limit for whiting in the Norway pout fishery in the North sea, but I hope that hon. Members will not get this out of perspective. The increases in the availability of the main white fish species in the North sea this year hardly suggest that the industrial fishing is damaging the stocks.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, who represents Norfolk, South, informed the House in opening a debate on 3 July that he would use every available argument against the Commission's proposals. We did that. But every other member state was prepared to agree the proposals and, as the increased total allowable catches for 1985 indicate, the scientific arguments against the proposals were not conclusive. In these circumstances we had no alternative but to negotiate. As a result of the firm line that we took, we secured major improvements in the proposals. Instead of a permanent change as proposed by the Commission, the Council agreed a temporary derogation expiring on 31 May 1985. I think that answers one point that I was asked.

The bycatch limit for whiting went up from 10 per cent. to 18 per cent., not 20 per cent. as originally proposed, while the limit for other species was of course reduced to 8 per cent. as proposed.

We also secured the introduction of new monitoring arrangements which will ensure that for the first time we shall know what effect the bycatch provision is having. In addition, we got the Commission to introduce a permanent regulation on the procedure for sampling the white fish bycatch in all small net fisheries.

The Department in Scotland has intensified its surveillance of the Norway pout fishery and stepped up the level of inspection, and 45 vessels have been boarded since 1 October last year. In most cases so far the bycatch percentage has been under, or close to, the original 10 per cent. limit. The original 10 per cent. limit will come back into effect as from 1 June 1985 unless the Council, on a proposal by the Commission, decides otherwise. The Government will clearly be very reluctant to see any extension of the increased limit, but we shall have to consider the facts of the matter as they are revealed by the results of the monitoring exercise and the up-to-date scientific advice when it comes forward at that time.

I have just touched on the amount of inspection that we have been giving the Norway pout fishing. That takes me on to the whole question of the enforcement of the quotas, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for City of Durham and other hon. Members. The House knows that the Government in every negotiation have been very keen on insisting that the quotas are properly enforced. As we know that we do this, we expect our European partners to enforce the quotas in the same way.

The industry and the House can be assured that we shall continue to impress upon the Commission the need to ensure that the rules of the CFP are properly enforced by all member states. Largely as a result of our efforts, the Commission set up its own fishery inspectorate to investigate how the rules are enforced by the Administrations of each member state. We saw a good deal of progress in 1984. The inspectorate carried out a programme of more than 50 visits to member states, during which many irregularities were uncovered,

At the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 4 December my right hon. Friend asked the Commission to produce a report on the first year's operation of the inspectorate. He also made it clear that we should look to the Commission to propose suitable penalties for systematic overfishing of quotas which is substantiated. Further improvements in the quota observance should result from the introduction of standard logbooks and landing returns which are now expected to be enforced in the Community by 1 April.

The hon. Member for City of Durham asked me about the policing and control of the Manx fisheries. We are satisfied with the control of the Manx herring fishery, which is largely prosecuted by Northern Irish vessels. We maintain a fishery protection vessel on station in that fishery, and the minimum landing sizes enforced on the Isle of Man are the same as for elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby asked about the 2,000 tonnes of cod for Denmark which were granted outside the total allowable catch. I confirm that the council agreed the 2,000 tonnes of cod for Denmark outside the TAC on the basis that this was the third year of an agreement reached in 1983. My right hon. Friend made it clear that we did not want to see that repeated next year.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby and my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives asked about Spanish vessels using the United Kingdom flag. Perhaps I should have mentioned that when I spoke about the Spanish accession problem. The legislation we introduced in 1983 has largely solved the problem of ex-Spanish vessels for the time being, but we are aware that the solution will not apply when Spain is a member of the Community. We are actively pursuing alternative solutions in our discussion

with the Commission and other member states. We are mindful of the problem that could occur when Spain joins the Community.

I was asked about the west Greenland cod. It was suggested that that was an imaginary fish, but we caught a small quantity of cod in west Greenland in 1984—about 10 tonnes. Fishing conditions were poor and are likely to be so again this year.

A small but important issue for my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, North-East is the question of Pittenweem harbour. If and when the harbour board introduces a proposal for development, it will be carefully considered by my right hon. Friend. All major expenditure on harbour work has to pass the test of investment appraisal as part of that consideration. My hon. Friend will welcome the news just given that the firm, M. Stewart and Sons Ltd., fish processors in Pittenweem, has just received a grant of £11,000 from the EC under the second round.

Many hon. Members touched on the difficult question of beam trawling. It was suggested that those hon. Members who opposed it should try airing their opposition in Brixham, but they did not all rush from the Chamber to do so.

Mr. Mark Hughes: We were waiting to listen to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary's reply.

Mr. MacKay: How nice! The current regulations prohibit beam trawling for sole or plaice within 12 miles of the coast by vessels over 70 gross registered tonnes or 300 brake horsepower. The need to protect inshore fishing grounds on which smaller fishermen are dependent from the impact of large beam trawlers is widely recognised, but the precise terms of the regulations present problems, especially for enforcement. The 300 bhp restriction is difficult to enforce, because in many cases the engine power of a vessel is not known and is not easy to measure. The practice of derating engines also presents a problem. The Commission's latest proposal attempts to define engine power in terms which it will be possible to apply at least to the range of engines in common use, and it provides that derating can be recognised only if it is carried out and certified by a competent authority. That might go some, but not all of the way to solving the enforcement problems.

The Commission has proposed deleting the tonnage criterion, since methods of establishing registered tonnage are not uniform among member states. That has given rise to legal problems. It proposes replacing the tonnage by a new formula of overall length of the vessel multiplied by the maximum beam, but that would be impossible to measure with great safety at sea, unless it was a calm day, and it is not clear that existing measurements of length of beam are always recorded on the certificates normally carried on board and that they would be the same measurements for each member state. That also poses a problem.

The fairest and most readily enforceable way of restricting the effective fishing power of beam trawlers within the 12-mile belt would be to return to the rule which Britain applied before 25 January 1983—a restriction on the overall length of fishing beams. There is widespread industry support for that, and we shall continue to press it, but I must tell the House that there is opposition within the Community, especially from the Netherlands.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked me whether I intended to introduce a ban on beam trawling, as I was urged to do during the Committee stage of the Inshore Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1984. The Government are considering the various propositions before them for action under the Act, but we believe that there is not enough scientific evidence for such a blanket prohibition, and I am sceptical of the need for such a measure. I hope that the revised proposals for inshore legislation will soon be issued to the industry for comment. Those who wish to comment on the presence or absence of anything about beam trawling will have the opportunity to do so.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland also asked me about Norway. He was worried—I understand his anxiety—that the Norwegians may take an excessive amount of herring from their portion of the North sea. All that I can say by way of reassurance is that Norway has given an undertaking to take account of the available biological advice in managing that fishery. Of course, we want negotiations with Norway to start as soon as possible, but as my right hon. Friend the Minister said, we must be sure that the negotiations are conducted on a proper basis and that the result is satisfactory to the British Government and to the fishing industry.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, with other hon. Members, asked me whether fisheries would be closed if the total allowable catches were met but some member country—he was especially worried about the United Kingdom—had some quota left. My right hon. Friend the Minister responded to that point, but perhaps I can repeat that we are aware of the anxiety in the industry about this possibility, and we have made the Commission aware that we are worried about it. It is unfair that in circumstances where Britain had tried to apportion its fishing catch throughout the year to give its fishing industry a year's work, we should discover towards the end of that year, when we had some quota remaining, that other countries had overfished, the total allowable catch had been exceeded, and the fishery was closed. We are discussing that matter with the Community.

Mr. Henderson: Does my hon. Friend accept the point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that the countries which suffered from that clampdown did not include Britain? I believe that France and Belgium suffered. To that extent, it would show our good faith if anxiety was expressed on the general principle, which is all the more reason why the Commission should regard our proposal in a reasonable way.

Mr. MacKay: Yes, we told the Commission that we thought it wrong that the French, who still had some quota to take up, had suffered the ban as well as the countries that had exceeded their quota.

I was asked about the sprat boxes. The closure of the various boxes—areas off Denmark and off the coasts of Scotland and England — will be reviewed by the Commission in the coming months with appropriate scientific advice. Sometimes scientific advice is welcome to our fishermen, and sometimes it is not. We must take it into consideration at all times, and not just when it suits us. The scientific advice will play an important part in our decision on the matter.

Our records of sightings of foreign vessels in the north of Scotland box last year suggest that fishing activity was at about the same level as in previous years.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland considers that the common fisheries policy should be amenable to

[Mr. MacKay]

renegotiation in the case of the north of Scotland box. However, with reference to the Norwegian pout, the hon. Gentleman told us that certain other aspects of the CFP are not amenable to renegotiation.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West referred to the question of redundancy for fishermen. Perhaps I should also point out that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who made one or two interventions, had also intended to speak, but he had to go home because he has a back problem that was beginning to play him up. I know that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow is also interested in this question.

Fisheries debates tend to be attended by a sub-group of the House of Commons. Almost every hon. Member who is here has attended such debates in the past, and knows that these matters have been fully discussed. There was an Adjournment debate on 13 April. The Secretary of State for Employment, who is responsible under the 1978 Act for statutory redundancy and who therefore deals with employment matters in all sectors of industry, replied to that debate. Also, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food explained in a written answer on 2 March that the fisheries Ministers had concluded that it would not be appropriate to introduce a special redundancy scheme for the fishing industry at this late stage in the process of change which the industry has undergone under successive Governments. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West will not be surprised by that answer, though he will be disappointed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: A manifest injustice faces those made redundant in the past who see people made redundant by Hamlings, for instance, who, although their conditions of work and length of service had been similar, are now receiving compensation because the law is being interpreted differently. That is a serious anomaly.

Secondly, I wonder whether Ministers are urging within the EEC that Europe has a responsibility? An organisation that compensates owners for decommissioning or laying up vessels should also compensate the fishermen made redundant in that process.

Mr. MacKay: If we were to change anything now, we would be doing so at the end of a long period of time in which many people have had to leave the industry. Those people would feel that they had been unfairly treated if some new measure were introduced at the tail end of such major changes.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby was not present when I alluded to his statement that the long-term prospects for the industry are good. I can even pray the hon. Gentleman himself in aid.

Mr. Randall: Is it not illogical to compensate the owners of the vessels that have lost the opportunity to fish and yet to give nothing to the deck hands and others who have worked in the industry?

Mr. MacKay: First, it was the owners who had made the investment. Secondly, we were attempting to slim the industry to a size that we thought would match the catching capacity.

Mr. Randall: What about the investment of labour?

Mr. MacKay: Opposition Members are entitled to have a go at me, but I must remind them that the Labour Government did not accept the arguments that were advanced either. If we changed our view now, we should be doing so at the tail end of the process. We have no intention of doing that.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby would not think it fair of me if I did not make some passing comment on a major part of his speech about Grimsby and British United Trawlers. I shall not comment, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister listened carefully to what he said. I am pretty certain from my hearing of the hon. Member that he would not have expected me to say anything other than that. With regard to Grimsby and Humberside, perhaps I might draw attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend is to meet the Humberside authorities on Monday 28 January to discuss the report that has been mentioned. Rather than enter into correspondence before the meeting, I assure the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West that probably more issues than he could have pursued will be dealt with at that meeting.

The debate has been a useful opportunity to hear the House's views on these matters and others that go wider of the documents but which are still concerned with the fishing industry. As my right hon. Friend has explained, circumstances prevented the House from being able to consider these documents before the Fisheries Council met on 19 December. Nevertheless, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that the negotiations conducted by my right hon. Friends and my hon. Friend have led to a satisfactory conclusion for the United Kingdom fishing industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10171/84 and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's unnumbered explanatory memorandum on 1985 total allowable catches and quotas; of the unnumbered explanatory memorandum on 1985 catch quotas in Greenland waters, and of the unnumbered explanatory memoranda on the fisheries agreements for 1985 between the European Community and Norway, the European Community and the Faroe Islands and the European Community and Spain; of European Community Documents Nos. 10697/84 on technical conservation measures and 10264/84 on 1985 fish guide prices; and welcomes and approves the provisional agreement reached on these arrangements for 1985 with the improvements obtained for the United Kingdom fishing industry.

Ethiopia (United Kingdom Aid)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]*

10.31 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring the House back to discussing United Kingdom aid to Ethiopia.

The horrors of the famine in Ethiopia have been in world headlines for three months. The response of the people of Britain in raising money for aid and of the charities to use that money effectively has been remarkable. The United Kingdom Government and many others have mounted a massive campaign to get short-term aid to Ethiopia. I believe that the Ethiopian Government, its people and other groups in Tigre and Eritrea have also made tremendous efforts to tackle the problems of the famine; but in Tigré and Wollo in Ethiopia, people are still dying at about the same rate as in October. There are more people in relief camps in Ethiopia and the Sudan and, if anything, the need for aid is growing rather than diminishing. Increasing numbers of people are being driven from their homes and villages in Ethiopia by the famine. Sadly, the massive effort has not resulted in the matter getting better. We can only claim that it has not got worse much more quickly.

The horrors that were reported on television in October, which I and other hon. Members and the Minister saw in November, are the result largely of the failure of the 1983 harvest. We now face the problems of the 1984 harvest. If we are able to get only 90,000 tonnes of food into Ethiopia through the port of Assab each month from now until October, we shall only hold the crisis at bay. If we can get only 20,000 tonnes of food into Ethiopia each month through the Sudan, we shall also only be holding the crisis at bay. All we are doing is preventing a horrific position from getting worse. It is against that background that I want to put specific questions to the Minister on what the Government are doing to try to improve conditions.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give the House up-to-date information about the pledges on food grain. Can he go back to his answer of 4 December and update the table on pledges for food grain and supplementary food for Ethiopia? What are the expected dates of arrival of those pledges in the port of Assab? Is he satisfied that enough has been promised for the next nine months to ensure that at least the present standard of aid can be continued?

Can the Minister explain to the House and to the country why the United Nations and the world food programme denied in November that there would be a shortage of grain in the port of Assab in December whereas, as I understand it, for almost three weeks there was insufficient grain in the port to keep the relief operation going at full force? What steps are the Government taking to try to sort out what appears to be a great deal of complacency and incompentence in the United Nations and the world food programme? Is he satisfied that the United Nations has got its co-ordination working?

Is it true that there is still insuffiicent food promised for delivery in April and May? What are the Government doing to ensure that sufficient food will be provided? Can the Minister tell us how much of the EC aid promised at the Dublin summit has been committed to Ethiopia and how far that has got into a programme for delivery from specific countries? Can he assure us that that aid earmarked for Ethiopia will get there at specific times?

Is the Minister satisfied that a steady supply of aid is planned to arrive at the port of Assab in the months from April to October? Is he satisfied that sufficient food has been promised for delivery through the Sudan to Western Tigré and Eritrea? Is he satisfied that there are sufficient vehicles to transport it on that route?

I am sure the Minister will agree that the RAF played a major role in moving the grain from Assab during November. It is still fulfilling that role. Can he tell us if the Government will ensure that the RAF remains there beyond the end of this month? I think that the initial promise was that it would be there for three months. Many people said from the start that it would be needed for much longer. I hope that the Government can promise now that the Hercules planes and the RAF will remain in Ethiopia for at least a further five or six months.

What steps have been taken to improve the handling capacity at the port of Assab? How many vehicles have our Government supplied; and are we in a position to increase the handling capacity of that port? Are we able to speed up the transport of grain by road into Wollo and Tigré?

Can the Minister tell us about increased supplies of supplementary food? When one talks to the relief agencies one finds that there is considerable concern that there are not facilities in some of the relief camps to mill grain and that some of the grain is not put to the best use because it is difficult for young children to eat it in the form in which it arrives. Can the Government say anything about the possibility of increasing supplementary food and helping the Ethiopian Government to process food if it does not arrive in a suitable form for young children.

Can the Minister tell us what is being done to improve accommodation in the camps, particularly if the small rains come in late January and February, to ensure that people are not out in he open?

This brings me on to medium-term aid. What are the Government doing to try to ensure that the people in the affected areas of Ethiopia will be able to return to their villages and plant crops in June, July, August and September if the 1985 rains come? What are we doing to help with the supply of seed and draught animals for ploughing? Are we able to give any short-term aid to ensure that the water is effectively trapped, to reduce the amount of soil erosion that results from some of the storms, and to help improve cultivation? What aims do we have to try to get sufficient food into the relief camps so that people can take three months supply of food back to their villages when they return to cultivate the land?

Can the Minister say more about the Government's attempts to negotiate long-term aid schemes with the Ethiopian Government? I am sure that on his visit he realised that it was not sufficient to provide only short-term aid and that we must look to long-term aid.

I am tremendously impressed by the efforts of the British people, be they school children or others, to raise money for Ethiopia. It is clear that my constituents and the people of this country want the starving to be fed now, and many feel strongly that this situation should not occur again. As I have said before, many people died in the affected areas of Ethiopia in 1965, they died in large numbers in 1973, and they are dying now. Now that the Minister and other hon. Members have been to see for

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themselves, we have an absolute responsibility to ensure that this does not happen again. The only way we can do so is by turning to long-term aid.

I hope that the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) will catch the eye of the Chair, after which I look forward to the Minister's reply.

10.42 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for allowing me time to participate in this debate. I support the general thrust of his arguments.

I wish to concentrate on one or two brief points. Since the House debated this matter just before Christmas, there have been increasing allegations that the Ethiopian Government have been using food aid to feed their troops and that food aid donated by the West and other agencies is going astray.

This is not the first time that such allegations have been made. On each and every occasion that they have been investigated, the allegations have been found to be without substance. In July 1981, a European Parliament delegation visited Ethiopia and reported that the country was making responsible and effective use of the food and other aid provided by the European Community and that there was no evidence to suggest that food was going astray. Again, in June 1983, another delegation from the European Parliament visited Ethiopia and satisfied itself that food aid was being properly used and, contrary to allegations, had not been diverted from its intended purpose. That was confirmed by a later report of the Commission of the European Community.

Neither Save the Children Fund nor Oxfam, which have teams in the Government-controlled areas of Ethiopia, have seen any evidence of relief supplies being diverted to the Ethiopian army, and the relief agency teams monitoring their own relief programmes have been able to confirm that money donated by the British public and others reaches its intended target. I have no doubt that the present Ethiopian Government have many faults, but I do not believe that the abuse of food aid is one of them.

It is a sad fact that, added to the continuing tragedy of famine in Ethiopia, there are now allegations of food aid going astray, based on propaganda arising out of the consequences of civil war. I fear that these allegations will only reduce the amount of food aid which Ethiopia as a whole receives.

As a consequence of these allegations, it has been requested that there should be a new international commission to supervise and control the relief offered. Already a number of the United Nations agencies have been involved. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the world food programme, to which reference has been made, and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees are already involved.

What we need is not a new commission but better co-ordination of the existing international agencies. I understand that the United Nations Secretary-General specifically appointed an Assistant Secretary-General, Kurt Jansson, to supervise the relief operation and to co-ordinate information from donor countries and agencies as to the food relief being sent. I should like to ask my right hon. Friend whether the British Government are satisfied that Kurt Jansson and the United Nations and its various agencies have now got a grip on the situation in order to ensure that relief aid is being distributed through their agencies to all parts of Ethiopia.

10.46 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): The House is indebted to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for raising the subject of British aid to Ethiopia and also to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). Both the hon. Member and my hon. Friend have followed the course of events in Ethiopia very steadily and persistently over the last year or two. We know of their very great concern about the subject. It is valuable that once again they should have come back to the topic. We know that the situation in Ethiopia is still very grave. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish was right to stress this point. I hope he will forgive me if I do not answer every single one of the string of pertinent questions which he put, but I shall try to answer by correspondence those that I am unable to tackle this evening. However, the hon. Member, as has my hon. Friend, reminded the House that there are very many important points which we have to keep closely in mind. I agree with what the hon. Member had to say about public opinion. Clearly public opinion has been aroused by this tragedy and will not suddenly forget all about the problem. It is deeply engraved in the minds of very many people.

It is sometimes implied that until last autumn we had done nothing about Ethiopia. Some people had never thought about Ethiopia and assumed that nobody else had thought about it, either. In fact, during the last two years our assistance to Ethiopia had been stepped up, and on a dozen or so occasions we had responded to appeals from international organisations and voluntary agencies for help in the worsening situation. In the period up to October 1984 the help given has cost the aid programme £15·5 million, half being our share of help provided through the European Community, in support of six separate actions.

On the long-term side, to which both the hon. Member and my hon. Friend referred, we have also been able to take the first steps towards restoring normal aid relations with Ethiopia. Twelve months ago we were happy to agree to provide support for postgraduate medical training at Addis Ababa which the Ethiopian Government saw as their highest priority. In addition, one of my educational advisers visited Ethiopia three months ago to assess training needs. We are currently considering her recommendations.

In July 1984, following the settlement of compensation for Mitchell Cotts, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), paid the first visit to Ethiopia by a British Minister for many years. While he was there he offered the Ethiopian Government the cancellation of repayments on outstanding aid loans, worth about £2·5 million. In recent months we have also agreed to fund a resumption of volunteer activities in Ethiopia.

So even before the intensification of interest in Ethiopia over the last few weeks we had in fact seen some building up of what I might call the normal development programme. But obviously in the last three months our efforts have necessarily been concentrated on providing emergency assistance for victims of the famine. As the scale of the human tragedy became more apparent, not least through the harrowing scenes shown on our television

screens, the Government have increased the help that they are giving, which now totals a further £14 million. In doing so, we have taken particular care to listen to the British agencies active in Ethiopia and to the views of our ambassador to ensure that our assistance is spent on equipment and supplies which quickly and directly help the relief operations.

To that end, as well as providing new Land-Rovers and dumper trucks, we have provided spare parts to get other vehicles back on the road, and mobile workshops to help keep them there so that supplies can be kept moving.

Through the voluntary agencies, we have provided two drilling rigs along with trucks and associated equipment; four Land-Rovers, five 30-tonne trucks; grain mills, tents, blankets, seeds, tools, polythene sheets and either the chartering of planes or the cost of airfreight for some of these and other items supplied by the agencies.

Our relief supplies have included 50 km of cable and rope and 500 tarpaulins. We have also provided grain conveyors and other items to help improve the handling facilities at the port of Assab—a question which has just been raised. As I saw for myself during my visit at the end of November, the operations there are now much more efficient, for which credit must go to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and the Marine Transport Authority of the Ethiopian Government.

During that visit, as I think the House knows, I went to the feeding centres at Korem and Mekele. They are as desolate as one would expect, but even the most starved-looking children can usually recover with food and care. Those visits brought home to me vividly the need for tents, blankets and medical supplies and, at my request on my return to this country, my officials sent further supplies of these items.

I should emphasise that we have been able to respond quickly in conjunction with the voluntary agencies. That was demonstrated again early in December when, following unexpected heavy rains at Alamata, we provided more tents and polythene sheeting within a very few days.

As the hon. Gentleman said, a particularly significant element of British assistance has been the detachment of two RAF Hercules together with a support team. These aircraft have been helping to move large quantities of relief supplies from Addis Ababa and the port of Assab to the areas of greatest immediate need. As well as food, they have transported medical supplies, clothing, blankets and vehicles. To date, they have moved over 4,000 tonnes working seven days a week including Christmas day.

In keeping with the best tradition of the service, the RAF responded to the request for help quickly—indeed, ours was the first foreign Government to set up an airborne famine relief operation—and the efficiency, friendly co-operation and professionalism with which it operates has won widespread praise from the relief agencies and the Ethiopian Government. That was made clear to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and also to me when each of us visited Addis Ababa.

I have been asked how long the airlift will continue. The initial commitment was for three months, but we are considering whether to extend that, taking into account the latest assessment of needs provided by the Ethiopian Government and the intentions of other donors. We must consider how we can best use the available resources and whether it is best to continue with the air operation or to concentrate on other things.

The individual items that I have described are important, but the greatest need is for food, particularly grain. In recent weeks, we have agreed to provide a further 21,500 tonnes of grain, and the first shipment of 6,500 tonnes arrived at the port of Massawa just after Christmas. However, the scale of the human disaster in Ethiopia clearly requires relief supplies, especially food, to be provided on a massive scale over a prolonged period.

That is why, at the end of October, we took the initiative in urging our partners in the European Community to make a significant response to the needs of Ethiopia and other drought-stricken countries in Africa. In the year to the end of October 1984, the Community had already made available 125,000 tonnes of grain and other food for Ethiopia. It then agreed on 6 November a further special programme of food aid and transport assistance, costing £35 million, for drought-affected countries in Africa. Ethiopia will be receiving 45,000 tonnes of cereals and about £8 million in other emergency relief from that programme.

In addition, as the hon. Gentleman has reminded us, the European Council, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister attended in Dublin, agreed on 4 December that the Community and its member states will provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain to drought-affected countries in Africa, including Ethiopia, during 1985.

The Community has since agreed to allocate £47 million from the emergency provision of the Lomé convention, and to transfer £53 million to the emergency provision of the 1984 Budget to finance the first 500,000 tonnes.

Such has been the reaction of the international community in recent weeks that more than 20 countries are now contributing to the relief efforts in Ethiopia, and the role of the United Nations co-ordinator, Mr. Jansson, is, therefore, of particular importance. He has already started to pull things together, in collaboration with the Ethiopian authorities and donors, and held a useful meeting in New York on 18 December.

We see one of Mr. Jansson's tasks, perhaps his most important task, as establishing the needs of Ethiopia in the next 12 months, and we hope that progress on this will be made in the next few weeks. It is clear that his task is difficult. Until now, the authorities have not really known what is due to arrive when. There have been instances when supplies have been overestimated and others when they have been underestimated. It is crucially important that the United Nations representative should have a full grasp of what is happening, and to do that he must have accurate and effective information from donor countries.

I was asked to give an assessment of needs, particularly after the month of March. I must in honesty say that it is difficult to say exactly what the flow will be after March. We have seen figures for the immediate period, for the first three months of this year, and they show that a substantial quantity of grain is on the way. In addition, substantial pledges have been made. There has been the generous response by way of promises from the Community, the United States and other countries.

It is important that not only should food come in in enormous quantities but that the pipeline should be properly managed, and that is a matter in which we shall take a close interest, although the responsibility for that lies with Mr. Jansson, with the world food programme and so on. It is extremely important that there should be co-ordination. I am concerned by recent reports which have

[Mr. Timothy Raison]

suggested that more food may arrive at the Ethiopian ports in the next two months than they have the capacity to handle, even though the capacity has been much improved.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It is important to keep the airlift there, because it played a crucial part in November in speeding up the handling of grain through the ports. If there is any surplus of grain, it is important that the airlift is kept going so that the supplies may be moved on as quickly as possible to the places where they are needed.

Mr. Raison: That is obviously a factor, but unloading is also a factor. I believe that the supplies to be allocated in the coming immediate period should be enough. They are substantial quantities which should be sufficient—and, if anything, too much — for the time being. Difficulties will be imposed if there is too much grain in the ports, not merely because of the handling difficulties but because of problems with storing it. The lesson to be learnt, therefore, is that while it is better to have too much than too little, we want a properly planned, steady, flow of grain in the period to come.

It is essential to ensure that relief supplies reach victims of the famine wherever they may be. As I told the House on 18 December, we have urged the Ethiopian Government to ensure that food and relief supplies reach all those areas, including Eritrea and Tigré, where it is needed and to ensure that military operations do not interfere with the movement of food and civilians. We believe that the best way to get the food there is to work through the voluntary agencies and the international committee of the Red Cross.

There is a peculiarly difficult situation, including the movement of refugees into the Sudan for which, as the House knows, I have in recent weeks announced further assistance totalling £1·85 million. We have made it clear that food must go where it is most needed. However, we firmly recognise Ethiopia's international frontiers, and we cannot support secession as part of the whole imbroglio. The organisations which have taken up arms against the Ethiopian Government cannot escape the fact that they have also contributed to the difficulties which exist in getting food where it is most needed.

Of course, if there were less fighting, if the Ethiopian Government did not devote their energies and foreign exchange to the purchase of arms and if there were more resources, more energy would be available for the country's development. We are bound to ask whether the Ethiopian Government could not do more to secure the willing consent of all the peoples of Ethiopia to their rule. All those interested in the welfare of Ethiopia are bound to observe that Ethiopia's internal difficulties inevitably hinder relief and development for the region as a whole

On the question whether food is failing to get through — a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury — it is fair to say that, although there are difficulties and although there have been reports of supplies being misappropriated, I believe that it would be quite wrong for the public to reach the conclusion that the money that they subscribe on food aid is a waste of money. The overwhelming bulk of the money both from the people of this counry and from the Government is reaching the right destination, and will continue to do so. I hope that no one is put off by the scare stories, although I accept that we have to watch the position carefully.

I should have liked to have said a little more about the longer-term because that, ultimately, is the answer to finding ways to prevent the recurrence of the famines. However, time does not permit that. I conclude by thanking both hon. Members for raising this topic. I hope that they will continue with their interest in it, because that is what the country expects.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 11 January 1985

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

A132 (Runwell)

9.35 am

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I have the honour to present a petition from the residents of the Rochford constituency. It is addressed

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

It draws attention to the dangerous nature of the A132 road through Runwell due to its twisty nature and the high speed of a great deal of traffic, including many heavy goods vehicles. The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the Honourable Members of the House of Commons, the relevant Minister and government department, will take appropriate action to ensure the safety of users of the A132 road at Runwell, and particularly pedestrians by

1. Constructing a bypass and/or
2. Establishing a pedestrian crossing near the church, and
3. Extending the 30 mile per hour limit to Rettendon Turnpike, and

fourthly, by adjusting the sign on the turn to Wickford on the A127 road so that traffic wishing to go to South Woodham Ferrers on the A130 is no longer persuaded to use the A132.

The petition is signed by the vicar of Runwell church and associated with it are more than 1,000 petitioners. I wish to associate myself with this petition and present it to this House.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

9.37 am

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I have the honour to present a petition on the matters contained within the Warnock report that deals with the status of the human embryo. It is signed by some 3,000 residents of Leeds, West and neighbouring constituencies. It reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

The views of the petitioners are deeply and sincerely held. It is a legitimate point of view that I am sure will be considered by all right hon. and hon. Members of this House. I have the honour to present the petition on behalf of the petitioners.

To lie upon the Table.

9.38 am

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I have the honour to present a petition concerning the protection of the human embryo and following the report of the Warnock committee. This is another petition that I present today; it contains more than 310 signatures of York constituents, and reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure which involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

This petition endorses the deeply held view of many York people. The work of some misguided scientists has not been natural and cannot be God's way. I know of the concern of the Church and all who look to Parliament to uphold high, moral and ethical standards in society. Do let us accept the spirit of this and similar petitions, embrace such safeguards in our legislation and protect and foster natural life.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

EDUCATION (CORPORAL PUNISHMENT)

Secretary Sir Keith Joseph, supported by Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Fowler, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Peter Brooke and Mr. Bob Dunn, presented a Bill to make provision in respect of the corporal punishment of pupils: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next and to be printed. [Bill 57.]

Acid Rain

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

9.39 am

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I welcome this opportunity to debate the report on acid rain of the Select Committee on the Environment, and with it the Government's reply to the report. I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for having kept his promise to find time for the debate. Select Committee reports are not frequently discussed on the Floor of the House. Indeed, not a single Environment Committee report was debated in the House for the whole of the 1979-83 Parliament. This is the third debate accorded to the present Committee since it was appointed to the House a little over 12 months ago, so we are indeed fortunate. Having said that, I must add, without, I hope, appearing a little churlish, that I would have preferred a better time for the debate than a Friday immediately following the end of a curtailed recess. We are discussing a subject of growing importance, when public awareness is heightening, and I know that many colleagues would have wished to be present had they been able to alter their arrangements. However, I recognise the Government's preference for a low-key parliamentary occasion on this subject, so I must be grateful for small mercies.

This is an all-party report of a Committee composed of seven Conservative Members, three Labour Members and one Liberal Member. It is a unanimous report. I wish to thank my colleagues on the Committee for all the hard work that they put in over three months to produce it in record time. Therefore, this is a House of Commons occasion, when the Back Benches seek to give some guidance to Ministers, having carried out in-depth research into matters that we know their administrative duties deny them the time to investigate in the same depth. I trust, therefore, that the debate will not be diminished by party-political posturing.

I say that directly to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) because I heard him on the radio this morning welcoming the report because it was "straight Labour party policy". Until the report was published, I do not recall any great concern about the matter by the Labour party, certainly not in the general election campaigns of 1979 and 1983. Moreover, when I raised the problem of sulphur emissions when I was on the Opposition Front Bench during the Second Reading of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, I did not receive a very forthcoming reply from the Labour Minister of the day. Therefore, I find it hard to see a Labour policy, but I recognise opportunism when I see it.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Labour party would reciprocate the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman started his speech, but he has now introduced the dimension that he sought to avoid. Does he not agree that we could close this point by saying that those who insist on and enthuse about the magic of the market must watch it carefully when we deal with national and international matters of environmental pollution?

Sir Hugh Rossi: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing that he agrees that this should be a House of Commons matter, and should not be diminished by party political posturing. I thought it only right, having heard the hon. Member for South Shields on the radio this morning, to respond to him, because it was the only opportunity for me so to do.

I now turn to the report. The term "acid rain" is a convenient and graphic description of the problems that we consider in it. The term is not used in its strictest sense. Not all that is covered by it is rain. We are equally concerned with dry depositions and so-called "occult" depositions, or mists, as we are with acidified rain water. Not all that is covered by the term is acid. We take into account the problems attributed to man-made ozone. However, there is a consistent common denominator. All with which the report is concerned are the products of the combustion of fossil fuels emitted into the atmosphere, which on return to ground level, either singly or in combination with one another or some other elements, cause damage to the physical environment. Therefore, acid rain is a result of burning coal or oil, whether in power stations, industrial plant, domestic boilers and grates or motor car engines, which corrodes buildings, destroys water life, damages forests, trees and plant life, and might be detrimental to human health.

The Committee commenced its inquiry with a completely open mind, and came to the unanimous conclusion that action needed to be put in hand without delay to combat the effects of acid rain. The reasoning that led to our conclusions is set out in detail in the report. Our conclusions were reached after taking and evaluating evidence both here and abroad, much of it of a technical and scientific nature, in which we were assisted by our specialist advisers, Professor Alan Williams of Leeds university and Dr. Nigel Bell of Imperial college, London, to whom we are indebted for all their help and advice.

The first matter that impressed us was the concern and anxiety over acid rain that we found on our visits to West Germany, where extensive tree and forest damage has been experienced, and to Scandinavia, where severe fish losses have been suffered through acidification of lakes and rivers. In those countries there is little doubt as to the cause, although some scientists have differed on how the effects have come about. In those countries, where damage is so extensive and obvious, there is a high level of public awareness and political pressure on Governments to act.

By contrast, in the United Kingdom, there is no such awareness and, indeed, comparatively little scientific monitoring and investigation taking place. The reasons for that are several. First, because of our climatic conditions, prevailing winds and infrequent periods of summer anti-cyclones, we have so far escaped the obvious effects experienced in West Germany and Scandinavia. Secondly, the Clean Air Act 1956 and the tremendous benefits brought about by smoke-free zones have lulled us into a false sense of security. The London smog that killed some 4,000 people in December 1952 has been banished, and we enjoy 70 per cent. more winter sunshine in central London than in those years, and many species of birds and plants have returned to the area which, previously, could not survive there. That legislation was far in advance of that achieved by any other country. By getting rid of the visible atmospheric pollution, the grit and the soot, we believed as a nation that the problem had been solved.

Thirdly, to that was added the tall chimney policy, as a result of which industrial smoke is sent high into the atmosphere and its contents carried by the prevailing

winds many miles from source. In consequence, public anxiety subsided and scientific investigation was reduced to a very low level.

There are large areas of the United Kingdom in which no monitoring of air quality has been taking place. The recording of acid deposition is patchy and primitive. Precious little has been done to study the corrosion of buildings for almost two decades. Inquiry into damage to trees and waterways has been unco-ordinated and on a minute scale. Meanwhile, vast quantities of invisible sulphur dioxide and various oxides of nitrogen have continued to be poured out into the atmosphere from the burning of coal and oil.

Today, the United Kingdom is the largest single emitter of sulphur dioxide in Europe outside the Soviet Union with something in the order of 5 million tonnes per annum. A similar picture emerges for nitrogen oxide where only western Germany produces more than we do.

No one challenges the scientific fact that when sulphur dioxide is deposited on sandstone or limestone a chemical reaction takes place which reduces to powder the surface of the buildings with which they are made. The Committee had to talk to the architect for Cologne cathedral to discover that.

When the Committee returned to the United Kingdom, it found that the Building Research Establishment had done no work on that for two decades; the CEGB had started investigating the problem some two years ago only; and the PSA had kept no central records. However, inquiries of the curators of several historical buildings revealed extensive and widespread damage extremely costly to repair.

The Committee was also told in western Germany that the modern reinforced concrete structures suffer. The acid penetrates to the metal rods, causing them to corrode, rust and expand, fracturing the concrete fabric by internal pressure. No one, but no one, has been able to confirm that to the Committee in the United Kingdom because of a complete lack of study.

When the Committee came to consider the effects upon water life, it found the scientific picture to be more complex. The extent to which water life is affected by depositions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide depends upon the geology of the catchment area of the waters. There is no doubt that increased acidity of water kills vulnerable eggs and fry especially after snow melts when there can be a sudden surge of acidity. High levels of acidity leach toxic metals into the water which kill adult fish.

The acid effect can be buffered in areas where there is calcium in the subsoil, so fish there suffer less than in areas where a comparable degree of acid deposition falls upon granite.

In Sweden, 18,000 out of 20,000 lakes are acidified and some 4,000 have entirely lost their fish stocks. In Norway a survey of 2,840 lakes showed that 1,711 had lost their fish due to acidification. In the United Kingdom, the Committee found that fish loss is now being experienced in Scotland. A fish farmer in Dumfriesshire suffered serious unexplained losses until scientific research commissioned by him from Stirling university revealed that it was due to acidification of a burn from which he drew his water. Although the Committee does not have evidence, it understands that Wales is now expressing anxiety.

Liming is recommended by some British sources as an antidote. There is no doubt that artificial additions of calcium can neutralise acidity. However, the Swedes consider that to be a temporary measure at best, and the Norwegians say that it is useless in fast-running waters. It cannot combat the acid surges from snow melt at breeding time. They argue that the remedy is to stop the emission of the acid at source and not to attempt to combat it when it has been deposited.

The Committee found the effects on acid rain on trees and forests more difficult to investigate. That was mainly due to the fact that original observations in western Germany had again blamed sulphur dioxide as being the main culprit. It was suggested by some of their scientists that that released toxic metals in the soils, damaging fibre roots.

More recent studies have shown that ozone produced as the result of a reaction between nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons in sunlight is a significant cause of needle burn and loss to pine trees. It now seems to be generally accepted in western Germany and Scandanavia and by some scientists in this country that ozone is the principal factor in tree damage in western Germany and Scandanavia. In western Germany, the Committee found that some 50 per cent. of the forests are affected.

However, it must be remembered that, whether sulphur dioxide or nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons combining into ozone are the main culprits, all are the result of burning fossil fuels. The distinction lies in the source, as evidence shows that the motor car engine is equally culpable in the production of nitrogen and hydrocarbons whereas sulphur dioxide comes mainly from industry and power stations.

So far, the United Kingdom can rejoice in that it seems to have escaped the serious effects that acid rain has had on water life and forests in other countries. Whether we are simply some years behind other countries in feeling the cumulative effects of acid deposition because we have been protected by our climatic conditions is impossible to say. That requires monitoring and research, which has not been taking place.

Hence the several recommendations that the Committee makes for such programmes, which I am pleased to note that the Government have accepted, including those for the development of new combustion technology in industry, power stations and motor car engines for the reduction of emissions.

I must express the Committee's gratitude for the fact that 19 of its 21 recommendations have been accepted by the Government and are to be acted upon. However, we are disappointed that the Government are not prepared to recognise the need for urgent action to reduce emissions. The experience of other countries suggests that, while damage may be slow in coming, it spreads rapidly when it does come, and the first signs have already appeared in this country.

The Committee feels also that we have a responsibility to our neighbours. Whilst our tall chimneys and prevailing winds enable us to export 70 per cent. of our sulphur dioxide production, saving ourselves from its worst effects, there is no doubt that we are causing severe damage in neighbouring countries.

Good international relations are important, as the Government recognise in many other aspects of their policy. It is therefore inexplicable that the Government should refuse to accept the Committee's recommendation

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

to join the "30 per cent. club" to which some 20 countries already belong. The commitment would be to reduce sulphur emissions by 30 per cent. by 1993, taking 1980 as the base year. This country has already achieved a 20 per cent. reduction in four years, leaving only the remaining 10 per cent. to be attained over the next nine years. Instead, the Government offer in their reply to attain that 10 per cent. over 16 years — by the end of the 1990s. The principle is accepted but the time scale is extended for what is, in the Committee's view, a dangerously long time. This cannot begin to be an exercise in international co-operation. Surely it is not necessary to be so excessively timid. It shows a regrettable lack of good neighbourliness.

Curious about this aspect of the Government's reply is the fact that, although they assert in paragraph 1.3 that they aim to achieve the 30 per cent. reduction by the 1990s, they do not say how they intend to achieve it. On the contrary. They go on to say that expenditure in curtailing flue gas desulphurisation in existing power stations cannot be justified.

If this solution is rejected and it is known that new combustion technologies will not be available for several years, let alone installed and operating, will the Minister please explain the precise Government programme for the 30 per cent. reduction and how it is intended to be achieved? The reply is totally silent on that.

The Committee also recommends that the Government embark, with our European partners, on a much more ambitious course than the 30 per cent. reduction; namely, the adoption of the EEC draft directive requiring a 60 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by 1995, again taking 1980 as the base year.

The power stations in Britain are by far the largest emitters both of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. The targets could be reached by the adaptation of some of the larger power stations and by requiring industry to install new technology as and when new factories are built.

The cost to the electricity generating industry would be substantial — approximately £1·5 billion, or the equivalent of a rise of 5 per cent. in electricity charges. All this cost, however, would be spread over a 10-year period.

It is perhaps understandable that the Government should have baulked at undertaking such a large expenditure, especially when their main preoccupation at present is to find every possible means of reducing public expenditure. It is even more understandable that the Government should have been reluctant when they have been receiving advice from not disinterested sources to the effect that it is by no means sure that the expenditure proposed would solve the problem.

In our report, we have collated evidence from a variety of outside sources from which information has not been collated before; evidence which has not previously been considered by Government advisers and Ministers. We believe that all the evidence leads inexorably to the conclusions that we have reached and that sooner or later the Government will be obliged to recognise the validity of our conclusions.

I can only express the hope that a more careful study will be made by the Government of the evidence that we have found and that they will then be moved to take urgent action before irrevocable damage is suffered, damage which in the long term will cost far more to mitigate than the sums posited in our report.

10.4 am

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I wish at the outset to congratulate the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on his exposition today and on his excellent Select Committee report. Indeed, the House and the country should congratulate him and his fellow Committee members on what they have done.

I need hardly say that I take exception to some of his earlier comments. We are discussing not only the Select Committee report but the Government's response to it in Cmnd. 9397. While I have no quarrel with the Conservative members of that Committee, I quarrel with the Government because, like the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, we are disappointed with their response to the two cardinal points of the report. It may be an inconvenient fact for the Government, but it happens that the Select Committee report follows Labour party policy as enunciated on many occasions from this Dispatch Box. I will not labour that point today, but, in view of the hon. Gentleman's comments, it is right that I should mention it.

I also associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's comments about having this debate today. We usually discuss non-contentious business on Fridays, whereas the Minister knows that a deep divide exists on this issue between the two sides of the House.

We claim that the Government are indifferent to this whole problem, and proof of that is to be found in Cmnd. 9397, for that response is contradictory, evasive, procrastinating, repetitive and, more important, completely wrong in its conclusions. The Government have so little to say in their puny response that they resort to mere repetition. For example, they say in paragraph 1.4:

"The United Kingdom has a proud record of achievement in tackling the massive legacy of pollution inherited from the past and the Government firmly intends to sustain that record."

That is obviously the opinion of the Government because they say in paragraph 2.28:

"The United Kingdom has a pround record of achievement in tackling the massive legacy of pollution inherited from the past and the Government firmly intends to sustain that record."

Methinks that they protest a little too much in their repetition, though perhaps we should give them full marks for consistency.

The tragedy is that that repeated statement shows the Government's failure to understand the problem of acid rain. To imply that the problem has been "inherited from the past" is basically false. The industrial revolution introduced the problem into the nation, but relatively recent developments by the CEGB, with its high-stack policy, have compounded the problem. It is a problem basically of modern dimensions which should and could be tackled today.

Inconsistencies in the Government's response occur again in paragraph 2.21, in which they allege, when talking about the reduction in acidic emissions:

"The nature of these reductions is such that resumed industrial growth is unlikely to reverse them."

In paragraph 3.62 they moderate their position and assert:

"It is reasonable to assume that much of this reduction will not be reversed as a consequence of continued industrial growth."

However, in the next paragraph, 3.63, they change their position again and say:

"stronger growth in electricity demand could reverse these trends."

Thus, in three paragraphs we have a complete change of position, though the third gives the game away. Much of our success in reducing acidic emissions has been as a result of the industrial recession into which the Government have led us deeper than any other Government in Europe, and, despite the recession, we are still the greatest polluter among the free nations of Europe. What the Government claim in apparent innocence in paragraph 3.62 about the 1980 date for the base mark in relation to emission reductions overlooks the fact that other countries have also reduced emissions. The Government are acting shamefully and their response highlights the shameful manner of their approach.

When I am asked to name the best resumé of the acid rain problem in the United Kingdom — there is a plethora of reports — I refer always to the Select Committee's report, which I hold in esteem. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green has said, the members of the Committee began their consideration of the problem with an open mind. They spent a great deal of time examining the issue. They went to Germany, Norway, Sweden, Cumbria, Galloway and other areas of Britain to study the problem. They produced an admirably well-thought-out and well-researched document and its conclusions should have the full support of the House. The conclusions are balanced, objective and realistic and it is sad that the Government cannot accept the principal ones. I hope that Conservative Back Benchers will get that message across to the Government. They will have our full support in their efforts to do so.

I acknowledge that the Government have accepted 19 of the 21 recommendations and I recognise that those recommendations are important. I take the Government's point about research and the collection of data, but I endorse the argument of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green that we can do all the research in the world but if we fail to take action quickly the damage will be irreparable and the cost even more prohibitive. Unless we accept that we shall threaten our own environment and that of our European neighbours. We shall risk also losing millions of pounds worth of exports and thousands of jobs.

The report that we are discussing is one of many to have appeared in the past 12 months. Acid rain is now much in vogue. However, I first came across the problem in the late 1960s when I was involved in a feasibility study of afforestation in the south Pennines. The project turned out to be impractical because the acidic emissions from the power stations in south-east Lancashire made tree growth extremely poor in the south Pennines. Accordingly, the scheme fell through. The Central Electricity Generating Board told us that we should not worry as it was only a matter of time before the effect of its high-stack policy would reverse the problem in the Pennines. It was right. Trees will now grow in the south Pennines. The acidic emissions have been reduced in that area. However, the same emissions are carried across to our Scandinavian neighbours.

That experience of the late 1960s made me sceptical about the CEGB's position. If acid rain was damaging trees in the south Pennines in the late 1960s, why does the CEGB deny that it is damaging the environment in Scandinavia now? That is a question which the board cannot answer. Indeed, there is no answer to it. However, it would be wrong to give the impression that acid rain no longer has any effect on the United Kingdom. It has a great effect and the problem is worsening quickly.

It must be acknowledged that we are still the largest producer of acidic emissions in the free western world. Much of the emission falls on the United Kingdom, which costs us dearly. A recent estimate of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology — it is the Government's advisory body — is that £200 million worth of agriculture and horticulture production has been lost because of acidic emissions. Furthermore, as the Select Committee outlines, there is costly damage to many of our historic buildings such as Westminster abbey, York minster and this Palace. The cost is immense.

The damage to the rural environment is perhaps even greater. The tenth report of the Royal Commission drew our attention to the problems of the waters in central Wales. It highlighted the Llyn Brianne area, which is fishless. This is due largely to acid rain. The North-West water authority has carried out a major study in the south-west of Cumbria and the English Lake District and its conclusions are disturbing. It has found evidence to suggest that surface waters in south-west Cumbria are affected by acid rain. It reports:

"In the Esk and the Duddon catchments, fishery surveys have shown that there are a number of fishless or very near fishless sites in upland regions. These sites had a geometric mean pH of 5·6 or less, and the correlation between fish stock density and pH has now been demonstrated."

The North-West water authority had no particular interest in drawing to the attention of the world the damage that has been inflicted on its water supplies, but that is what it did.

The Friends of the Earth in Scotland brought across a German forestry expert. He examined some trees which I have seen in the Lake District and other areas. Mr. Puhe came to this conclusion:

"If we had observed these signs in Germany we would have classified them as being caused by air pollution."

I could give many further examples to show that our lakes and waterways are being poisoned and our tress killed. Much of the damage is being caused to sensitive areas of our country. However, our problems are small compared with those of Norway, Sweden and Germany.

The Germans are concerned about the extent of the damage, but the key factor is the speed at which it is occurring. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said that 50 per cent. of German forests were found to be damaged in 1984 whereas only 8 per cent. were damaged in 1982. In 1983, 34 per cent. of forests were damaged. The speed of the damage is of a geometric proportion, and that is why the German Government are pressing so vigorously in the EEC for action. They are introducing and implementing stiff domestic legislative measures to try to tackle the problem.

The damage has been immense in Scandinavia. The hon. Member for Wood Green and Hornsey and I have visited the Tordval area of Norway. Anyone who has been there and to certain areas of Sweden cannot fail to be impressed by the damage which has been caused and the great efforts and large sums of money which the Norwegian and Swedish Governments are making and spending to try to tackle the problem.

One result of the damage has been a demand for international action. It is clear that this is a transboundary problem. I believe passionately in the United Kingdom, but I find it offensive that in Europe only my country is

[Dr. David Clark]

refusing to play its full part in the international scene. The good name of our country is being besmirched by the Government's inaction. This is bound to have an effect on our trading position and lead to job losses. Intense anger is directed against this country in West Germany, Norway and Sweden because of the problems and the damage that is being caused by acid rain. Acid rain may be an esoteric subject in Britain, but it is almost inculcated into the culture of Scandinavia, especially in Norway.

Instead of being the laggards in pollution control, Britain should be in the van. Pollution control technology could offer many opportunities for British engineering firms such as NEI, Babcock and the Howden group. If only we took up the entrepreneurial spirit we could find a great market in this area of technology. Filtering technology is available and should be used at a number of our power stations. If five or six of our major power stations were retrofitted, they would, as the Select Committee report states, be able to meet the obligations of the 30 per cent. reduction. That would save much environmental pollution and provide jobs and export opportunities. It would provide jobs in that particular technology and in the British coal industry.

I hope that the majority of us in this place consider that the coal industry has a future and will be one of our major suppliers of energy. I regret that coal is regarded as a dirty energy production option by many countries.

If research into the fluidised bed combustion system were to be speeded up, the markets for that technology and the export of coal would be immense and would be opened up. About £25 million is going into that at the moment. That would be particularly important for coal from those threatened areas of Scotland and Wales which are relatively sulphur free or have a low level of sulphur.

That was impressed on me last September when I was taken to the district heating plant at Södertalje in Sweden. That was the first modern coal-burning station to be built in Sweden for many years. It was impressive to see much of that coal coming from Britain, being ground up with British technology and then filtered, and meeting all the stringent requirements of the Swedish Government's emission controls. There is much potential for the export of British coal if we can also provide the technology for sulphur-free coal.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): The Select Committee also visited the power station in Sweden about which my hon. Friend is talking and two significant matters came to light. One was that the air emitted from the power station was cleaner than the air around the power station that was taken into the power station and the other was that the people there claimed — and we have no reason to disbelieve them—that that power station, using British coal to provide district heating, produced cheaper energy than their hydro-electricity.

Dr. Clark: Once again, I find myself in agreement with a member of the Select Committee.

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): The hon. Gentleman talks as though he favours the coal industry, but he also refers to fluidised bed combustion which is not yet available for power stations and is not likely to be available until the year 2000. But he wishes to sell coal in great quantities.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman and I have crossed swords on a number of occasions and I expect that we shall continue to do so. My main point was that if research into the fluidised bed combustion system were speeded up it would be available sooner than the hon. Gentleman suggests. I do not accept his time scale because he is generally a pessimist in such matters.

The scrubbing and filtering technologies already exist. The Select Committee has shown that, and it has suggested that they should be retrofitted. That is a worthwhile suggestion.

There is international concern about Britain's isolationist position. It is all very well for the Government to issue statements of good intent, but we want a little more from them. If they have that good intent, why will they not agree to sign the 30 per cent. reduction as 18 other countries have? We should do so as well.

As the Select Committee said, we should be actively supporting the EEC directive for a 60 per cent. reduction of SO_2 and a 40 per cent. reduction of nitrogen oxide. We should be retrofitting some of our generating stations—perhaps five or six—which would allow us to achieve a 30 per cent. reduction if we were to agree to that. All that would not only provide much needed jobs but — I emphasise this — would provide us with a springboard for export potential into the developing technology of pollution control.

In rejecting the Select Committee's report, the Government are acting in a wantonly irresponsible manner which threatens our countryside, that of our neighbours, and, indeed, many jobs. In essence, they are—I choose my words carefully—waging chemical warfare not only on our neighbours but on our country.

We oppose the Government's policy and support the Select Committee's report. I hope that hon. Members from both sides of the House will feel able to tell the Government that they are wrong and that the Select Committee is right.

10.23 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave): One of the signs of the seriousness with which the Government take the Select Committee's report is the presence today of my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), representing Scotland, which has an important interest in this matter, for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), representing the Department of Energy, and for the City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), representing Britain's research input.

The Government take not only the subject but the report with great seriousness. I pay tribute, as the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has done, to the work of the Select Committee and to the persuasive advocacy of its report which we have heard from the Chairman today. It was a considerable achievement to produce such a report in such a short time. Although, as is well known, there are some aspects of it with which the Government do not agree, we immediately accepted a considerable range of its recommendations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said.

We accept, as any Government must, that the report has identified some of the gaps in research and monitoring which need to be filled, as indeed did the Warren Spring

report earlier, and we are moving to fill those gaps. We accept that more needs to be done and that more must be done in those areas.

My hon. Friend was right to pay tribute to Britain's air pollution record. I am sorry if we irritated the hon. Member for South Shields by saying that twice, but it is true that Britain has had a good record in air pollution over the years, and we do not intend to diminish it.

The hon. Gentleman accused us of inconsistency, but I detected some rather more fundamental inconsistencies in his speech. The Select Committee's recommendations are coherent, but I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's were. He talked of five or six retrofits to meet the 30 per cent. cut—a rather pessimistic view of what would be needed — but he also said that he accepted the EEC large plants directive in toto. That means at least retrofitting all of them. The hon. Gentleman may like to consider those two contradictory recommendations.

It would not be using the time of the House sensibly for me to repeat the Government's published response today. Instead, I want to comment on some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, to develop the debate a little further if possible, to explain the different emphases where they differ, what we support and why we do so, and what we propose should happen next.

There is a case which the United Kingdom must answer on the acidification of ground waters in southern Scandinavia. The case is rather different from that of forest damage. The more we learn about those subjects the more those two aspects are separating themselves, and they need to be treated with some care and differently.

The work referred to by the hon. Member for South Shields by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and by my hon. Friend's Department at Pitlochry shows the beginnings of evidence of some kind of linear relationship between depositions and emissions. We have, from the ITE work, clear evidence of declining depositions in the Lake District, which runs just about in parallel with the decline which we have had in our sulphur emissions over the same period. Therefore, despite the complexities of the atmospheric chemistry involved, we are beginning to establish some kind of relationship between emissions and depositions. It sounds common sense to say that what goes up must come down, but, as those members of the Select Committee who studied the matter know, it is more complicated. The atmospheric chemistry is complex and it is worth studying properly. However, we are beginning to establish a relationship.

There is not much doubt in my mind that, with an essentially vulnerable granitic geology — an acid soil with thin buffering and no limestone about — the addition of further acid is liable to cause trouble. That seems to be common sense. It is not a matter of simply seeking to hide behind further work or to obfuscate the science, but we have yet to establish a model of what gains are obtained for improvements in the depositions.

The major fall of 40 per cent. in Britain's sulphur emissions—20 per cent. of it since 1980—is not to be sneezed at. Gains are now being seen in this country and should soon be measurable in Norway and southern Sweden. Those of us who followed in the path of the Select Committee and were shown great courtesy and hospitality by Norwegian friends and others are aware that those areas seem to have experienced a worsening of the problem at the very time when one would have expected some improvement due to the sharp fall in the acid deposition contribution of this country and one or two others. More work is therefore needed.

When one is spending other people's money, in this case electricity consumers' money, it is always easy for Ministers to push for crash programmes, but we are still ignorant about an essential part of the problem in terms of a genuine cost benefit analysis: not so much in terms of money, but in terms of the environmental gain to be achieved from reductions in deposition. I have seen some of the work being carried out in Norway, some of it jointly financed by this country and Scandinavia. Work is also being undertaken in Wales, Scotland and the Lake District and more will be undertaken in response to the Select Committee's report. That being so, I believe that it is right to wait to see what we are likely to get for our money.

A minor criticism of the Select Committee discussion of ground water acidification problems is that it may have underestimated the land use change aspect. The hon. Member for South Shields has considerable expertise in this. I suspect that forestry methods, including methods of cropping trees—what is left and what is not—may make a considerable difference. Changes of practice in recent years, leaving bark and brushwood in situ, have had a beneficial effect on the soil. I agree with the Select Committee that liming may be useful in certain lakes and lochs with a relatively low water turnover, but it is no solution to the problems of the thousands of small lakes in Norway. It may help as a stop-gap while depositions decline, but it is no overall answer to the problem.

The problem of acidification of ground water in vulnerable areas due to long-distance transportation of acid deposition is a serious problem. We must establish the crucial link between the gains to be expected from further diminutions in deposition. A massive experiment is under way, in that we have already produced a 40 per cent. fall in depositions, so we should be able to start measuring the gains from that.

The problem is quite separate from that of motor car emissions and nitrogen oxide emissions. I am not sure whether the report mentioned nitrogen oxide emissions, but the Select Committee certainly understands the subject. These emissions appear not to cause any damage in Norway, because the vegetation fixes the nitrogen so that there is no contribution to water acidification. In this context, there are some interesting dogs which do not bark in the night. There seems not to be widespread forest damage of the German type in southern Scandinavia, although some damaged stands of trees have been discovered. This is a reminder that forest damage is not simply a matter of acidification of the atmosphere. The hon. Member for South Shields referred to his own work in the Pennines, which showed that acid caused tree damage of the kind experienced in Germany. This direct damage is like that caused by old-fashioned smog. Similar damage is caused in some parts of southern Germany by intense low-level mist. There is damage to trees, but it is a different type of problem.

Dr. David Clark: When the Minister visited Scandinavia he was not able to see the problem in Sweden. Forest damage in Norway is small, but in the southern part of Sweden it is extensive and growing. That should be put on record.

Mr. Waldegrave: My point is that the situation in southern Norway shows that extensive acidification does

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not necessarily cause tree damage. If there is tree damage in Sweden, which I do not deny, resulting from the same kind of pollutant soup as causes damage in Germany, there must be differences between Norway and Sweden in this respect.

Mr. Allan Roberts: The Minister makes some very interesting points, but neither the Select Committee nor any of the scientists or ecologists whom we met in Scandanavia would claim that acid rain alone causes the damage. It is a contributory factor, causing damage in some circumstances, but not in others.

Mr. Waldegrave: I entirely agree, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. It will not have escaped his attention, however, that in some simplifications in the popular press the view is taken that more acid necessarily means more damage, and vice versa.

Mr. Spearing: That is not in the Select Committee's report.

Mr. Waldegrave: I make no criticism of the Select Committee. Indeed, I have made it clear that I agree with the Select Committee on this. The acidification of ground water is a sulphur dioxide problem and is not related to the nitrogen oxide problem, whereas the damage to trees in Germany probably is.

Sir Hugh Rossi: We seem to be falling into the trap of using the term "acid rain" in two senses. There is the strict sense relating to the formation of mild suphuric acid through the combination of sulphur and water. There is then the wider sense referring to the result of burning fossil fuels ultimately producing ozone. The Select Committee found that it was the combination of sulphur and ozone which caused the problem. One scientist referred to the combination as a "poison cocktail", which is a good description of what is causing tree damage.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are certainly difficulties of terminology. In a way, it might be better to abandon the term "acid rain" altogether and to refer to the various pollutants in their separate manifestations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green has provided an accurate resumé on the subject of forest damage. Britain's contribution to this and the general problem of long-range transboundary sulphur transmission causing forest damage in Germany is a different problem from that of ground water acidification in Scandinavia.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, there is a sort of cocktail or soup. It is becoming increasingly agreed—my scientific advisers take the same view as the Select Committee on this point — that although there may be some background acidification of various kinds—and, as carbon dioxide dissolves in rain, rainfall is slightly acid naturally—the principal problem is caused by a reaction between the hydrocarbon and nitrogen oxide elements of the soup and sunlight, which produces ozone. That explains why there is more tree damage at high levels, where there is more ozone.

Research is understandably being done in desperate haste in the central European countries, and there is by no means unanimous agreement yet. However, there seems to be the beginning of the formation of a consensus among some of the best scientists on this theory. Many other factors must also be involved. Stresses on the trees must be viewed as a whole. Years of drought, or particularly harsh winters, will also have their effect. There may be soil problems, too. The trees become susceptible to damage from a number of sources, and anything that adds to the stress should be avoided.

The British Government and all other European Governments should try to help the central European countries to find a solution to their pressing and dramatic problem. It would be wrong to think that the British Government do not understand that a real crisis faces the Germans and a number of other central European peoples. Tragic things are happening on the eastern side of the iron curtain, where public debates such as this do not take place and where public opinion cannot respond as it can in the free countries. Terrible damage is occurring to parts of the Bohemian forests which will be very difficult to reverse.

We must try to establish a regime of pollution control in Europe which allows the Germans and others to do what is necessary. We agree entirely with the Select Committee about the principal limb of such a regime: there should be another forward push on motor car pollution. In terms of contributions to nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons — which are probably the crucial ingredients of the unpleasant cocktail—the motor car is the main polluter.

There is a debating point here which is hard to resist, especially as it is a real point too. It would help us all if the Germans tackled the problem of their speed limits. Their own scientists state that if that were done they could cut nitrogen oxide emissions by 18 per cent. straightaway. In any case, the European Community must seek to evolve a motor car pollution control regime that will enable each country to take action without falling foul of Community law. We are trying to negotiate such a regime.

It is no secret that the Germans want to make more rapid progress than most of the other countries of the Community, but we must remember the severe dangers of allowing the European market in motor cars to break up. No one would gain from that except the Japanese. Commissioner Davignon, having heard people urge the instant fitting of three-way catalysts to all cars, said that he had never before heard a proposal put forward in the Community for the direct subsidy of the Japanese car industry. We must pay attention to the need to maintain the internal market. However, I hope that the Community will reach broad agreement on the matter. With luck, that should have a massive effect on forest damage.

There is another point which may have been made in the Select Committee's report, although I did not see it there. Lean burn by itself does nothing about hydrocarbons. It does something about nitrogen oxide which, with the sunlight and the hydrocarbons, produces the ozone, but it may be necessary to do something specifically about the unburnt hydrocarbons in exhaust fumes. The oxidation catalyst might be worth considering, at least for some cars, as a way of tackling the problem. It would be simpler and cheaper than the three-way catalyst.

It is no secret that the part of the report with which, in scientific terms, the Government had most difficulty was the passage on building damage. The information and measurements given to us suggest a somewhat different cause for the damage that is still taking place to medieval buildings at a dramatic rate.

I know Wells cathedral very well. It is built of limestone. The magnificent west front has rightly been called the greatest collection of medieval sculpture north of the Alps. That stone has been terribly damaged. We believe that the evidence shows that the damage is the result of dry deposition—local deposition—that took place some years ago. The process—which the Select Committee rightly described as the crystallisation of salt within the pores of the stone, which then cracks the stone—continues for a very long time.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The generality of what my hon. Friend says may be right, but will he concede our point at least in some very important cases, such as Lincoln cathederal, which is in the plume path of the Trentside power stations, and York minster, with its relatively soft limestone? The surveyors of the fabric of York minster left us in no doubt about the fact that acid deposition is the major cause of the corrosion of the stonework.

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not disagree with the idea that the damage has been caused by acid deposition. However, it is likely that the damage is being caused by local deposition which took place some time ago. It may be that, as the Select Committee said, there has not been enough monitoring on a national scale. However, urban monitoring has shown dramatic declines in urban sulphur dioxide pollution over 20 years, and yet the crumbling of the stonework has continued. I fear that, whatever we did now, the damage would continue to occur for a considerable time.

Sir Hugh Rossi: The Select Committee entirely accepted the view that damage was far heavier in the past when the concentrations of sulphur dioxide in the atmosphere were much greater. There is no doubt that there has been a diminution.

Nevertheless, the evidence that we receive from architects who examine the buildings regularly is that the damage is continuing today. By far the greatest emitters of sulphur dioxide today—responsible for 66 per cent. of the total emission in the United Kingdom—are our power stations. The Central Electricity Generating Board may well be advising the Minister to consider past and local pollution before he turns to the power stations, but there is no escaping the truth.

Mr. Waldegrave: Clearly, this is an area of scientific disagreement between the Government and the Select Committee. I assure my hon. Friend that I am not being advised by the CEGB on the matter. The CEGB does not advise my Department.

The damage is certainly continuing. I am advised that the crystallisation of the salt goes on remorselessly year after year. One cannot argue the question both ways. One cannot say both that the high-stack policy has moved the stuff, and that it has remained where it used to be.

I think that the first thing that I said on arriving at the Department was, "What about the medieval cathedrals?" They have the same cultural importance in this country, perhaps, as the forests have in Germany, and any damage to them must be of great public interest. I have been advised that the argument may not be as powerful as it may have appeared to the Select Committee to be. However, the Select Committee will have many advocates here today.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Leaving aside medieval cathedrals, Liverpool cathedral has been built this century—work began just after 1906 and was finished relatively recently—and yet the roof covering is having to be replaced because of the effects of acid rain. Will the Minister deal with that issue? Moreover, will he say who is to bear the cost of the work, as many great buildings throughout the country are suffering and we can hardly go to the European Community to ask for money as we have rejected the relevant EC draft directive?

Mr. Waldegrave: The peak year for urban sulphur was as late as 1961. It took some time to implement the clean air legislation. We are now down to about 30 per cent. of that peak in urban concentrations of sulphur. That is a dramatic improvement. The hon. Gentleman's point about Liverpool cathedral does not therefore contradict what I have said.

Mr. Allan Roberts: How does the Minister square that with our seeing that recent restoration work at Cologne cathedral to replace stone which had been damaged by acid rain is now itself being damaged by acid rain?

Mr. Waldegrave: Low-level pollution in Germany will have declined even more recently than in Britain, because that country did not have clean air Acts. Moreover, there has been no decline in nitrogen oxide, which derives especially from motor cars in urban areas. There is not necessarily a contradiction. The Select Committee makes a broad case, without having to rely on this aspect of the matter so heavily.

We accept the Select Committee's suggestion that it is essential to monitor potential health dangers. The Select Committee on Social Services is a little like the tabloids used to be about the private lives of prominent people in public life when they said, "The rumours were denied." We have no evidence of health risks which are derived from acid rain. We have known about the dangers in Scotland arising from plumbo-solvency in water supplies. By far the greatest contributory factor to that is peat water. The contribution of acidic deposition is extremely small.

The Government agree with the Select Committee on a range of issues concerning research and monitoring. We agree about the importance of the cocktail or soup of nitrogen oxide, hydrocarbons and sunlight in forest damage. Lean burn is a sensible route to achieve energy savings and reduced pollution. The Government agree with the Select Committee about the importance of work being done on the benign technologies such as pressurised fluid bed combustion. We shall all be happy if such things can be got on stream and made economically viable. However, the engineers still have to solve considerable technological problems. We agree that it is sensible to take a precautionary view and try further to diminish the output of nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide.

As to our committing ourselves to a further reduction without a detailed programme, I must observe that we have taken what we believe is a realistic assessment of industrial trends, the shape of industry in the future, further gains in energy conservation and the additional contribution of nuclear energy, which many hon. Members want. It is reasonable to assume that further reductions will be possible without retrofitting flue gas desulphurisation. Unlike other countries, we have not signed up for the so-called 30 per cent. club. We believe

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that it will be achieved, but we are not sure that it will occur without FGD and do not think that the economics of FGD are sensible.

The Government have no argument with the Select Committee's sums in regard to the cost of meeting the large plants directive. There is not much argument about it costing £1·5 billion. We have not made that large commitment because we believe, on the basis of the evidence, which I hope I have set out reasonably impartially and to which the Select Committee's report has been a major contribution, that no Government would be responsible if they charged into an enormous crash programme now. We have achieved our 40 per cent. improvement. It would be easy to go on increasing the price of electricity and to add further problems to the burning of coal. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard) is normally an Opposition spokesman on ecological matters, but, speaking to the national executive committee at the 1984 Labour party conference, she said that the problem of acid rain might have been played up in recent months merely to knock the coal industry during the miners' strike. That is one of the voices of the Labour party.

Dr. David Clark: Might I add that, during that debate, the Labour party conference gave an overwhelming mandate to the type of policy that I have advocated today?

Mr. Waldegrave: If I may say so without embarrassing the hon. Member for South Shields, I prefer him to the hon. Member for Brightside as the Labour party's ecological spokesman.

There is no escaping the fact that the economics of coal burn must get worse, in spite of possible gains in employment for the exporters of technology. We must examine the process industries. Their margins are so narrow that any unnecessary increase in the price of electricity would be crucial. We must also consider all other consumers of electricity and jobs in the round. We have concluded, as we have said in our report, that to rush into a crash programme that would cost between £1·5 billion and £2 billion is not right.

Once again I pay tribute to the Chairman of the Select Committee and his team for producing a useful and stimulating report.

10.56 am

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I shall not dwell on the mechanics of acid precipitation and its effects, because they have been dealt with. I too am grateful to the Select Committeee for its thorough investigations and recommendations. The House owes it a debt.

I shall concentrate on some specific issues and emphasise what the Government should do to deal with the problem effectively. In south-west Scotland and the west central Highlands, the problem is especially worrying. Many lochs and streams have become acidified and therefore fishless. It is now clear that 57 Scottish lochs are affected in that way not because those areas receive more acidic rain than other parts of the United Kingdom but because of the volume of rainfall and the low buffering capacity of the underlying rocks. Forests do not seem to have suffered to the same extent so far. I was interested to note the Government's response on page 8 of their reply which says:

"a new form of damage to trees has recently been observed in North and West Britain".

I take it that "North and West Britain" means Scotland. Perhaps the Minister will give further details.

As for the more general circumstances in the northern hemisphere, 90 per cent. of sulphur dioxide in industrialised regions is man-made. The Government's response to the Select Committee report states that rain has been made much more acid by man. There is no doubt about that. The United Kingdom is the largest emitter of sulphur dioxide in western Europe — 80 per cent. of sulphur deposited in Britain is produced by us. In the United Kingdom, the sources of most of the pollution are tin England. The Central Electricity Generating Board produces 63 per cent. of all sulphur dioxide pollution and 46 per cent. of all nitrous oxide pollution.

Apart from the pollution that orginates from motor vehicle exhausts, coal and oil-fired power stations and the large industrial plants are primarily responsible for our pollution. In Scotland we have only two coal-fired power stations normally on stream — at Longannet and Cockenzie. They produce only 2 per cent. of the total United Kingdom sulphur dioxide emissions and are not largely responsible for the effects from which Scotland suffers.

Evidence exists that the most acidic episodes of precipitations in the Scottish Highlands occur when the south-east winds prevail. On 20 February 1984, a deep layer of sooty snow was deposited in the Cairngorms. It was brought by air currents which had passed over the English midlands and south Yorkshire—that is, over the areas that have concentrations of coal-fired power stations. The black snow undoubtedly led to fish kills in west Highland waters shortly afterwards.

Because of such events, it is possible for us to understand what the people of Norway and Sweden feel about pollution. On a parliamentary visit to Norway about 10 years ago, the attention of the parliamentary group was drawn to the fact that many of the lakes could no longer produce trout. Our hosts explained it by emissions from factories in the Soviet Union. It was either diplomatic or charitable of them to say that to a delegation from the United Kingdom, but some of us with knowledge of the prevailing winds in Norway were doubtful. Nowadays they are not in any doubt about laying the responsibility where it should lie.

I now turn to the remedies of these unhappy circumstances. Four types of action can help to reduce pollution. The first is electricity conservation. That should be of interest to any Government, apart from the question of acid rain. The other three are using coal with a low sulphur content, using the fluidised bed conversion method and using desulphurisation methods after combustion.

If I may plug the Scottish coalfield, it happens, as the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said, that its coal has the lowest sulphur content in the United Kingdom. It would make good sense to use that coal and it makes nonsense of any plans which the Government and the National Coal Board may have to contract operations in the Scottish coalfield. Apart from other considerations, such actions are environmentally unsound.

Both the Royal Commission on the Environment and the Select Committee on the Environment recently dealt with and made firm recommendations on combustion and desulphurisation. The option is flue gas desulphurisation.

If the United Kingdom is to meet the EC directives on SO_2 and nitrogen oxide emissions from large plants, it will be necessary to go ahead with flue gas desulphurisation at the largest power stations. I welcome both the directive and the commitment of those countries which have joined the so-called 30 per cent. club. It is a pity that the Government are dragging their heels on those developments.

The cost to CEGB consumers of meeting the cost of flue gas desulphurisation would be about 6 per cent. on electricity bills over 10 years, which is considerably less than that which the Government tried a year or two ago to force on the same consumers. It is a small price to pay for a clean environment and the good neighbourliness to which the Government document refers and which the Government claim to support.

The Minister repudiated the charge that the Government were unaware of the problem. The serious charge is that the Government are well aware of it and are being extremely dilatory in taking the necessary action to cure it.

11.3 am

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am extremely grateful to be called to make a short contribution as a member of the Select Committee on the Environment. I began by praising the Government for arranging the debate. It is characteristically a little ungenerous of hon. Members to complain that it is being held on a Friday. We had 22 days' notice. More important, the pens of the commentators will be no more blunted by the debate taking place on a Friday than will the print of *Hansard* be faded. What is important is the Government's approach to our Committee's report.

I assure my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that the Committee began its long inquiry with a completely open mind. He may be consoled by the fact that at least seven of the 11 members started with the assumption that we were not likely to encourage unnecessarily an increase in public expenditure or in the public sector borrowing requirement, if we could possibly help it. We were backed by considerable specialist advice. I join our Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), in paying tribute to Professor Williams of Leeds university and Dr. Nigel Bell of Imperial college for the tremendous specialist advice that they gave us.

Mr. Skeet: If the Government were to accept the proposals outlined in paragraph 196 of the report—that is, the 60:40:40 ratio—what would that mean in terms of the cost to the CEGB and to the public who would be the consumers of electricity?

Mr. Chapman: My hon. Friend shows great foresight in anticipating the subjects with which I shall deal shortly.

We amassed a considerable amount of evidence and closely questioned many scientists and specialists about acid deposition in this and many European countries. The evidence was compelling, even if—my hon. Friends accepted this from the outset—it was not absolutely conclusive in scientific terms.

We reached two inescapable main conclusions. First, there is an urgent need for much more research and monitoring. I am reassured by the Government's response in that respect. Secondly, there is a need for urgent action by the United Kingdom Government, pending further evidence from other countries' experience, that delay will very probably make remedial action too late because the damage caused by acid deposition can spread at an alarmingly rapid rate.

Whatever else we may be, we are not ecological nutcases looking for every possible avenue to promote every environmental cause to salvage our political consciences in other areas. We are considering areas where damage, if it takes place, will cause a great deal of environmental loss and amass a considerable amount of financial cost to our nation. It is important that that is said explicitly by some of my hon. Friends.

The problem with political awareness of acid deposition, unlike smog, is that it is invisible. The political problem in Britain is that there are few outwardly visible examples of damage caused by acid deposition, although the number is increasing. We are, happily, more fortunate than are most European countries because of our geographical position, surrounded as we are by seas, and because of our geology. Norway and Sweden are especially vulnerable not only because of geography—they lie in the wake of much of the exported United Kingdom pollution — but because of their geology. Sparse soil on top of an especially hard substratum of rock, mostly granite, makes their problem especially great. There is much more acidification in their waters because the acid cannot permeate the substratum so easily, and it runs off into their rivers and lakes.

The Committee was appalled to discover that 18,000 of the 20,000 lakes in southern Sweden have been damaged, and that 4,000 of them are now fishless. The result is that many of the lakes have become, to quote the words of Keith Spence writing in *Country Life* on 15 November last year,

"nothing more than beautiful dead mirrors."

The ecological consequences are extremely serious.

Sulphur dioxide is only one of the pollutants about which we should be worried. Britain is a main offender in emitting sulphur dioxide. It is the largest European exporter to other countries of SO_2 with the exception of West Germany, and I am told that last year Britain emitted 3·72 million tonnes of sulphur dioxide——

Mr. Skeet: A big drop.

Mr. Chapman: Yes, it is a big drop, and I shall come to that point in a moment.

Not only does Britain export more to other countries than does almost any other European country, but much of it falls on our friends in Norway and Sweden. Although there has been a dramatic reduction during the past 15 years, the emissions from power stations, which are the worst offenders, and which contribute more than half of the total emissions, have increased since 1960 and are at about the same level as they were in 1970. There has been no dramatic reduction in emissions from power stations, and I hope that I can say that without initiating a bitter attack on the National Coal Board, the National Union of Mineworkers or the Central Electricity Generating Board.

The cost of taking action must be at the back of the Government's mind. If we accepted the membership, if that is the right phrase, of the 30 per cent. club, and if we accepted the EC draft directive—I am using the figures of the CEGB and trying to respond as openly as I can—it is estimated that coal-fired electricity generating costs would increase by 9 per cent. to 10 per cent. Since about half of our electricity is produced by coal-fired power

[Mr. Chapman]

stations, that would increase electricity prices by 5 per cent. to 6 per cent. Many people believe that the increase will be smaller, but I shall accept the CEGB figures. Of course, the increase would be over at least 10 years.

If our 12 major power stations were retrofitted during the next 10 years, at a cost of £1,432 million at 1983 prices —we would therefore probably have to pay more than £1·5 billion at today's prices—we would achieve the 60 per cent. reduction on 1980 levels by 1995, as requested in the EC draft directive. That is a great deal of money, but I hope that the cost can be put into perspective. If I were sitting on the Opposition Benches, I might ask the Minister to say, as a guide, by how much electricity prices have increased during the past 10 years. That might put the 5 per cent. increase in a more meaningful light.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Gentleman is correct to draw this matter to the attention of the House. On the credit side, does he accept that the resulting good will and the economic opportunities that would develop in Scandinavia in appreciation of that exercise might make it a profitable venture?

Mr. Chapman: Indeed, and I hope to refer to that later.

I shall say a few words about the alleged damage to buildings, and I presume to do so as a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. I shall focus my remarks especially on those buildings which, by any definition, are part of our marvellous architectural heritage. There is little doubt—again I choose my words carefully—that acid deposition increases the corrosion of stonework, but, of course, it is only one factor; I have no doubt that the older the building the less it is a factor in the total corrosion of its stonework to date. I also accept that the geographical position of the building is a major factor. It must be obvious, even to non-scientific minds, that corrosion from acid deposition is likely to be greater if a building stands in the plume path of a series of power stations than if it is sited on hills facing the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, corrosion represents an expensive problem in some buildings. The Select Committee visited Cologne cathedral. In paying tribute to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who is Chairman of the Committee, may I say that I was fascinated to hear him talk about our meeting the architect of Cologne cathedral—I had not realised that he was so old. On reflection, my hon. Friend was probably right to say that, because we were watching the replacement of a replica of a replica. It could be argued that much of Cologne cathedral, at least the part that is outwardly visible, is relatively new.

Lincoln cathedral has a great problem in this respect. The surveyor of the fabric of York minster had no doubt that acid deposition was the main cause of the corrosion of the magnesian limestone, which is relatively soft—many of our buildings, including the Palace of Westminster, are built from relatively soft stone, not granite—and, in at least some buildings, meant that increasing acid deposition was a costly item in conserving our architectural heritage. Therefore, I especially welcome the Government's response to the recommendations in paragraphs 36 and 37 of our report, and the fact that increased research and monitoring will take place at some of our cathedrals, including Lincoln.

The Select Committee did not visit Poland, but there is much evidence that acid deposition has put the fine 13th century gothic buildings of Cracow under great threat.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the severe problem in Poland, but once again it is the old problem of low-level intensive smog that is causing the disaster there.

Mr. Chapman: I accept entirely my hon. Friend's point, but in the wider generality of my argument I am sure he will accept my views as being equally valid.

As hon. Members have said, we have a fundamental obligation to our neighbours in Europe. Yes, the costs will be large, but the opportunities are there. Surely it is not beyond the wit and diplomatic skill of any United Kingdom Government to see that, if we are to invest hugely, to the tune of £1·5 billion to £2 billion, there will be a beneficial spin-off in the sale and development of technology, a point aptly touched on by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). I nearly said "my hon. Friend" because we have an agreeable pairing arrangement with each other. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shh."] I apologise to the hon. Member. We share environmental interests. I am sure that the Whips get their own back because whenever we appear in the Chamber together there is never a vote. I hope that there will not be an exception today.

There would be beneficial spin-offs from such investment. We have the skill to do it properly and we must screw more money out of the European Community. Already my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has directed the debate towards ensuring that conservation becomes part of the Community agricultural budget and should be partially paid for out of it. Here we have a heaven-sent opportunity to try to press for the reorganisation of the European Community budget. There are opportunities as well as great financial liabilities.

It is possible, over a 10-year rolling programme, to achieve what the 20 countries of the 30 per cent. club have set out to do and accept the EC draft directive, which aims to reduce sulphur dioxide emission by 60 per cent. My hon. Friend the Minister was honest in his approach. He said that we did not choose to join the 30 per cent. club because we could not guarantee that we could deliver the reductions in emissions. However, at least some of those 20 countries are in exactly the same position, but have committed themselves. Could not the Government join the 30 per cent. club, adding that rider and saying that it is a rider that we are sure all the other 20 members of the club have at the back of their minds? Could not the Government think earnestly about agreeing to the EC draft directive?

Let me just set out the possible chronological scenario. In 18 months, we should be in a position of having set up the considerable increase in research programmes that is necessary, and we should have set up the extra monitoring stations in the recommended parts of the country. By 1989, we should know more certainly, from the extra research that has taken place into pressurised fluidised bed combustion development whether the necessary technology can be produced more cheaply or more effectively in order to retrofit some or all of the power stations, so that we might not be involved in such a great expense as hitherto we have imagined. Therefore, it should be possible to meet the European deadline of 1995.

I hope that the Government will have second thoughts about this, even if they have to add that diplomatic rider.

I hope that they will subscribe to the 30 per cent. club, accept the EC draft directive and show the positive commitment that they have done in their programme to eliminate lead from petrol — a commitment that I applaud.

11.25 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I agree with the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman). I hope that I should take even less time than he did, because many hon. Members wish to speak, as they recognise that this is a vital issue. I shall not complain about this debate being on a Friday, as we are supposed to be full-time Members of Parliament.

The Government may have advanced a little from the position that they maintained in our last debate on environmental matters. I was extremely critical of the Minister's approach then, as he may recall. At least we may now congratulate him on having accepted the support for research. He accepted that for nitrate pollution in Question Time on Wednesday and we now have ample evidence that the Government are prepared to engage in research on these matters, although we need a rather more marked commitment. Embarking on costly development expenditure research alone will no longer suffice. We hope that the two principal failures of the Government in regard to the Select Committee's report will be amended.

The Minister's comments about Norway reminded me of the position that I was in about five or six years ago when, in the Council of Europe, I was seeking to persuade the Norwegians not to press their complaints about the United Kingdom. I said then that the forestry practices in the Tordval valley meant that the marginal nature of the soil and the granite condition of the area created the problem rather than atmospheric emissions from the United Kingdom. I was advised by those interested in the matter that fish deaths in the Tordval valley in the 19th century, before our large chimneys were erected, showed that those practices were responsible. I went along with that approach, until I realised that the thousands of lakes and rivers in Scandinavia where forestry practices cannot be a problem and where fish deaths in the 19th century appear not to have occurred suggested that we were making excuses. We were also seen to be so doing. A great deal of animosity between Scandinavia and ourselves has arisen because four or five years ago we seemed to be trying to evade the issue.

Since then, the problem has become worse. We have to show our good faith and accept that we cannot go on poisoning our neighbours. The cost of our poisoning is serious for our Scandinavian neighbours. Many Conservative Members, and perhaps a few Labour Members, are not concerned about causing problems for our neighbours, although that is no way for any civilised and trading country — I hope that we shall remain a trading country — to operate. However I point out to those who maintain such a cynical attitude that the problems of the past 20 or 30 years in Scandinavia are now occurring here.

Those who are not interested in the ecology of our islands may be able to take a fairly placid view of the problem. However, in a couple of weeks, thousands of people will be reading an article in a magazine called *Birds*, which some hon. Members may have received yesterday, which talks about the decline of the dipper. It is an attractive, fairly widely distributed little bird, whose numbers are now rapidly diminishing. This problem is occurring because of the acidification of our water courses, which has killed off the food on which the birds depend.

I am reminded of the fact, as the coal industry is relevant to this issue, that until relatively recently miners took canaries down collieries with them, not to hear them sing but because the canary died before the man did. The dipper can serve as a similar indicator for our civilisation. If a fairly tough little bird is being wiped out from the areas in our islands that it has long inhabited, that could show that we are polluting our planet, and doing so with a far too easy-going an approach. The Government should embark on the necessary expenditure. It will be only a tiny part of the expenditure that they have incurred through increased electricity costs as a consequence of the miners' strike. The extra cost of the oil burn will not be as much as the cost of cleaning up our sulphur emissions from power stations.

We must consider fluidised bed combustion. I recognise that the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) is exceedingly pessimistic about that. I do not know the source of his information——

Mr. Skeet *rose*——

Mr. Hardy: I shall not give way on this occasion; the hon. Gentleman will no doubt contribute later in the debate.

It is already possible for the fluidised bed to be developed. We can show our neighbours that we take their problems as well as our problems seriously. During 1983, and recognising the retreat that had developed in the mining industry, I twice in this House called upon the chairman of the National Coal Board and Ministers in the Department of Energy to take an optimistic and positive step on the fluidised bed. If they had done so, they would have encouraged the mining industry, which might have had a dramatic effect last year.

We cannot afford to neglect that magnifient opportunity. It would take our burning of fossil fuels out of the 19th century and into the 21st century. We have been too dependent upon 19th century combustion technology for coal. We need to take that leap forward, for both economic and commercial reasons. It would serve the cause of the environment and also coalfield economies —something that is desperately needed.

Above all, the Government must spend money. They should devote a small proportion of the £50,000 million from our offshore industries to put Britain in good order and bring about a system within Europe that would command respect rather than hatred for Britain.

11.31 am

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to the debate. In response to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), I cannot resist saying that his argument about the effects of fossil fuels would be more convincing if he would embrace the argument that one way of reducing acid rain emissions is to accelerate the speed with which we are commissioning and building nuclear power stations. I find it astonishing that among those who have jumped on the acid rain bandwagon with such haste are those who are quick to attack nuclear power.

I declare something of an interest, because one of the Scottish lochs which is badly affected by high acid levels

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and has been the subject of much scrutiny and research is Loch Ard, which is in the middle of my constituency and quite literally on my doorstep.

Although much of the debate, both inside and outside the House, has centred on the effects of sulphur and nitrogen oxides produced by industry and power stations, and recently the interaction between the gases and products from the internal combustion engine, I want to leave the debate on those matters to the members of the Committee. Far be it from me, as someone who was neither a member of the Committee nor has any claim to great expertise in the subject, to embark upon that highly technical debate. It would be difficult for me to make any meaningful comment.

I wish briefly to refer to the question of how far the impact of atmospheric pollution is exacerbated by the activities of commercial forestry, especially in Scotland. While the Committee did not go into that matter in any great depth, several witnesses were questioned—notably the Forestry Commission, the Natural Environment Research Council and Department of the Environment officials.

The NERC made a significant reference to the problem, which is not a new one. I recall reading an article in *The Observer* last September which said that it had somehow obtained unpublished official documents from the Welsh water authority, which had found that

"the rivers, streams and lakes surrounded by coniferous forests are much more deadly than identical ones in open moorland."

I do not know whether the Welsh water authority referred to that in its evidence to the Committee. The evidence was not published in the final report.

As part of the NERC evidence, there is a note on the work of Macaulay Institute for Soil Research at Aberdeen, and many of the experiments were carried out in my constituency. The institute looked at stands of Sitka spruce to examine their throughput of acid rain. Subsequent research extended that to examine the effects on other types of trees. That research appears to show that certain types of trees, especially pines, create very acid soil.

While that higher than normal acidity in the soil did not usually appear to affect the acidity of streams, after draining the areas concerned a period of high rainfall appeared to result in a marked rise in the acidity of the streams. The significance of that is that improved drainage is often a feature of new forestry activity and planting, and the easier run-off of rain water seems likely to increase the amount of acidity entering streams, rivers and lakes.

For those in Scotland who are especially concerned about the impact of acid rain on the fish population, there is a further factor which has nothing to do with the acidity arising from the drainage problem. It is that the quicker run-off destroys salmon beds and other spawning grounds and thereby reduces the embryo population of fish. That is not unique to this country. Indeed, there was an interesting article recently in a magazine about research in the United States. Although generally everyone seems to blame power stations for the problem, in America they blame Smokey Bear, which is the symbol used to prevent people from throwing away matches and starting forest fires. A theory has been advanced that, even though there are natural coniferous forests, the acid rain problem has been increased because below the trees on the floor of the forest there is a build-up of pine needles and acid humus which greatly increases the acidity of water passing through it. In the natural state of things forest fires would occur which would burn up that carpet and create an alkaline neutralising influence, but because of the impact of commercial forestry taking away the trees, and because of the management that prevents forest fires, the balance has been shifted towards acidity.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Select Committee received considerable evidence when it was in Norway that, although there is some scientific evidence that the existence of coniferous trees increases the acidity in the soil around the trees, it is also clear that in Norway the lakes and trees above the tree line are affected by acid to an even greater extent than those below the tree line? That, therefore, cannot be the cause of the increased acidity.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. As I said earlier, I do not want to become involved in the detail of the argument that concerned the Committee. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I apologise for my parochialism in talking exclusively about the Scottish problem.

Loch Ard has been affected comparatively recently by high acid levels and, regrettably, by a substantial reduction in the trout population, if not the perch population. The fact that that has coincided with the ringing of Loch Ard by coniferous forests is a coincidence which should be studied.

The research carried out by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Loch Ard shows high acid levels in the water, but above the tree line on Ben Lomond there is no acid problem at all. The Norwegian problem may be that the acid is coming from the deposition of water on the area, but that is not the case in Loch Ard. Ben Lomond receives the same rain and, indeed, provides the head water to the Forth.

Those who are jumping up and down in my consitutency and elsewhere in Scotland telling me that the fish are dying because my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is not prepared to join the 30 per cent. club must deal with that problem. They should address their remarks to the activities of the Forestry Commission and look at the evidence of forestry as a means of creating acidity if they are concerned about acid levels in the water supply. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), which is that if we are discussing the deposition of acid, we must look to the power stations, and so on.

I am sorry that, having identified the problem of ground water acidity arising from forestry activities in paragraph 52 of its report, the Committee went on to minimise its importance and made no recommendation for action. That was disappointing. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for the fact that I shall not be here when he winds up the debate, but I have a long-standing commitment in my constituency. However, I should like him to give an assurance that the Government will not allow the Committee's neglect of the issue to lead to any reduction in the research into the highly complex relationship between alternative land uses and their impact on the acidity of our rivers, lakes and lochs. I am pleased to notice from the evidence of the NERC that it spent an estimated £500,000 last year on those and other related areas of research, and I welcome the fact that others are also working in the area.

Reducing the pollution of the atmosphere that creates acid rain is only one side of the coin. The other is to try to restore the natural way in which the soil and the plant life that it supports act to reduce the acidity before it enters our rivers and lochs. To do so, we require a greater understanding than we currently possess of the way in which the water interacts with the environment on its progress from raindrops to rivers. Our current lack of knowledge is shown in the report. It is interesting to compare the evidence of the Macaulay institute research, which showed clear differences between the acidity of water passing through different types of trees, with the answer given by the Forestry Commission to question 477, when it was claimed that

"whether there were conifers or broad leaves, the same drain, the same imbalance occurs."

Both cannot be correct. As new Forestry Commission and private forestry developments, with subsidies, are continually taking place, and mature forests are being regularly felled and replaced in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, it is essential that the implications of current methods of forestry are understood and that where they can be seen to be potentially damaging to the environment and the rural economy of many areas of Britain, particularly Scotland, they are changed, or the developments abandoned. If, as seems to be the case, in some areas we are in danger of creating a few jobs in forestry at the cost of destroying many jobs in tourism —the former all too often being subsidised, while the latter is profitable and taxed—an examination of current policies is imperative. I leave aside the incalculable cost in terms of damage to the environment.

I have no wish to detract from the main thrust of the Committee's report or to quarrel with the Government's response, but my concern is to look at the initial causes of acidic pollution of the atmosphere and at what further steps can and should be taken to reduce them even more than we have over the past 30 years. We do not forget that other factors are at work that make a serious and significant contribution to the end consequences of pollution.

11.44 am

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): There is no doubt that in the past decade or so there has been a rapidly increasing public interest in the effects of pollution of one kind or another on our environment and our health. I should like to make one or two points about Scotland before I embark on more general matters.

First, I should like to refer to the composition of the Committee. It is interesting and regrettable that there is not one Scottish Member on it from either side of the House, yet the debate is being wound up by two Front Bench spokesmen from Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen) and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. I have no complaint about that, but it is important to the House to recognise that it is a United Kingdom Committee and a United Kingdom problem. The various parts of the United Kingdom should be represented on such Committees.

It is also a pity that the Scottish Office was not asked, nor did it offer, to give any evidence to the Committee, yet the Scottish problem excited a great deal of interest among the Scottish people. I shall address some points specifically to the Minister, which I believe are important. Before I do so, I should like to refer to matters that have not been referred to hitherto. One is the effect of acid rain —I use the term in the general sense that the Committee used — on human health. In Sweden, the Committee found evidence that acid rain is an increasing threat. There is evidence in Sweden that acid rain increases the corrosion of copper pipes. The leaching of copper and lead from water supply pipes by increasingly acidic water and the leaching from soil of heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury into water can have serious implications for human health. Those are not trivial matters. Evidence was cited of copper leaching having caused diarrhoea in small babies, and that was confirmed by United Nations organisations and supported by evidence from the United States.

Those points were put to the chief scientist at the Department of the Environment, Dr. Holdgate, and he did not know anything about them. He said that "limited work" had been done on lead and copper piping. I should like to know—I think that the House and the country would also like to know — exactly what that limited work is on lead and copper piping. Research in West Germany and the United States suggested that serious health effects arose from sulphate particles in the atmosphere. The number suffering from asthma, allergy, hay fever, bronchitis and so on was rising. Evidence from both the United States and Sweden was that, if sulphur dioxide levels could be cut by 30 per cent. from the 1978 levels, annual deaths from United States pollutant emissions could be reduced by 10,000. That is a substantial problem. The British people have a right to ask what our Government are doing about those frightening facts. They are literally matters of life and death.

The Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), reiterated a fact that shines through the whole report. There is virtually a complete absence of research in many of those areas. The Committee recommended that there should be research into

"all aspects of risk to human health"

consequent on acidic rain. There was no attempt to respond to that recommendation. If the matter was not so serious, the Government's responses would be laughable. All that they did was refer to the fact that the smog in London has virtually disappeared. I remember it vividly. I lost my way walking in London in that terrible smog in 1952. I did not know where I was—[HON. MEMBERS: "You still don't know."] Perhaps. That was a terrifying experience, and we are all glad that the smog has disappeared—I hope, for ever.

I wish to return to the subject of our water supply. I discount the one third or one quarter of the water which leaks away through our ever-decaying pipes. When the water reaches our taps, there is a disturbing increase in the rising levels of poisonous metal concentrates in our water. That is a matter of considerable anxiety, but, according to the Government's response, it does not worry them too much. In their reply the Government said:

"the capacity of acid waters to dissolve lead from plumbing has been known for many years and has led to preventive action, especially in Scotland."

The Government say that this problem has been or is being dealt with "especially in Scotland". I gave notice to the Minister that I wanted to ask him questions about water piping in Scotland. What is happening about the replacement of lead piping in houses, hotels, hospitals and other public buildings? What has happened during the past few years to inspire that reference to Scotland in the

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Government's reply? What additional cash has been allocated to the local authorities to replace those lead pipes? The problem must be identified, emphasised and returned to until the matter is put right, because it is literally a matter of life and death. What is the scale of the problem? Are any statistics available? For instance, how many houses, schools, universities and hospitals are still supplied through lead pipes?

Other problems have been referred to which are not as important as that one, but they are important. I need not expand on the effect of acid rain on fish life, because the Minister is well aware of the problem. In Galloway, evidence was given of the deleterious effects of acid rain on fish life there and elsewhere, but there has been little study of this problem and still less of the solution.

The bulk of the problem is caused by the burning of coal in power stations and of oil in refineries, petrochemical complexes and motor cars. The CEGB seems to take the view that that pinpoints the need to expedite the development and replacement of coal-fired stations by nuclear-powered stations. There is not much support for that proposition from the Opposition. It would create a hell of a lot more problems than it would solve. The Minister talked about the cost of converting the power stations. He accepted this morning that the figure of £1·5 billion was about right, give or take £500 million. It could be £2 billion, but it would be spread over 10 years.

With little evidence of having done much homework on the matter, the CBI said—it would, wouldn't it?—that industry could not afford an increase of about 5 or 6 per cent. in the cost of energy over 10 years. That is nonsense, when we remember how electricity prices have been increased over the past three or four years.

The sum of £1·5 billion is nonsense. It is all very well for the Minister to say, as the Government did in their reply, that we must ensure that we have value for money. When I hear that I remember that it is just about the amount of cash that we will be spending in the Falkland Islands over the next three years. There is no question of the Government saying that we must ensure that we have value for money when we are dealing with 1,200 folk 8,000 miles away. We pour about £2 billion into the Falkland Islands, but when it comes to spending £1·5 billion over 10 years the Government say that they are not convinced that we will get value for money. What value are we getting for our money in the Falkland Islands? It is a matter of priority in public expenditure.

If the will were there to solve the pollution problem, it could be solved. Moreover, the more reluctant we are to deal with it, as has been pointed out time and time again on both sides of the House, the more soured become our relations with Scandinavia and other parts of Europe, because they are much more conscious of the problem and are at the receiving end of our filth and of the belching out of dangerous materials due to the prevailing winds and the rest.

For all those reasons—my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) talked about the prospects for exporting advanced technologies to solve the problems which is an extremely important consideration — this subject calls for a much more imaginative reply from the Government.

The Opposition hope that we will return to these matters, if not precisely to this report, within the next two or three years because they are vital. The Government's record on such matters is deplorable, as is their response to the report. If the debate had taken place on any day other than a Friday the Opposition would certainly have voted on it.

11.57 am

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): There are lessons for the Government; there are lessons for the forest cultivators; there are lessons for the automotive engineers; and there are lessons for generators of electricity to be learnt on this subject. The Government have received a great deal of instruction this morning from these Benches, and perhaps the first lesson for them is that a reputation for enlightenment in matters of pollution and pollution control is one at which they have to work continuously if they wish to retain it.

British Governments in post-war years have rightly had attributed to them a good reputation for taking care in such matters, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said, there is some way to go with the newly discovered dangers. We need to match the reputation that we rightly acquired with our pioneering work in clean air legislation and in cleaning rivers. There is hard work for the Government to do if they are to polish a hard-won reputation.

There are lessons for the forest cultivators to learn. Cultivated plantations of trees are a series of miniature chemical systems. That is especially true of conifers. As the conifer matures it begins to shed into its environment a degree of acidity as it renders itself more alkaline. It is interesting to note — perhaps it is obvious — that in natural circumstances that tree would in due course die and fall and return the alkalinity to the ground. But when the forest is a plantation made by man and when the timber is cut and taken away, the forest ground is steadily rendered more acidic. This process has contributed to damage in forest areas and the water systems of those areas and must be borne in mind as a contributory factor.

A conclusion to draw at this stage is that almost all environmental arguments, when we consider the best interests of the ecology of these islands, seem to converge on a preference for the broad leaf deciduous tree and not for the economically easier conifer tree. All the best interests of our countryside and wildlife—and, in this case, of toxicity and acidity—lead to the deciduous tree being the preferred tree in our natural environment.

The lessons for the automotive engineers are clear enough. Much publicity has recently been given to prototype electric cars. The simple fact is that until there is a vast breakthrough in the technology of electrical energy storage or portable energy storage we shall not have realistically in Britain the main automotive carriage of people and goods accomplished electrically. For the time being at any rate—until there is a step change in the technology of electricity storage — we shall have the internal combusion engine as our servant on the road.

Improvements in the oxides of nitrogen emissions from motor cars all seem to argue for the lean burn engine rather than for the much more complex and often less reliable chemistry of the catalysts, which are preferred by some but which I believe are not the better conclusion.

There are some important lessons for the generators of energy. I was surprised throughout the hearings which led to the report — I too had the privilege of being a member of the Select Committee—that the CEGB did

not take an altogether neutral and detached attitude. The CEGB could have told the politicians, "Tell us by what extent, as you speak on behalf of society generally, you would like us to reduce SO_2 emissions, in particular from our coal burn. If you tell us by what amount you want us to reduce it, we will tell you how much it will cost and you can then decide whether you are prepared to pay". That would have been a cogent position for the CEGB to have taken and I remain surprised that it did not take it.

Whoever should learn lessons from the consideration of this subject and from the report—I have enumerated four—it is certain that those who will truly derive comfort and support from all the deliberations now going on are the adherents of those arguments that say that increasing priority should be given to generating electricity by nuclear means and that less priority will have to be given to generating electricity by burning an extremely valuable mineral, namely coal.

12.4 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I join the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) in commending the development of lean burn engines rather than the catalyst as a method of reducing nitrogen oxide. I am sure that lean burn engines are the right way to proceed. I join the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for South Shields (Dr. Clark) in urging the need for the greater development of flue gas desulphurisation equipment because of both the beneficial impact on the environment of doing that and because of the opportunity for creating new jobs that would result.

The Minister said that there was little evidence about the destruction of tree life in Scandinavia. In paragraph 70*(b)* of the Select Committee report, we refer to the experience that the Select Committee had in Scandinavia:

"A survey of all 12 counties in south and central Sweden in the winter of 1983 reported 244 damaged stands of trees. A sample survey since has extrapolated a damage area of 17-18 per cent."

That evidence was further underlined by Professor Tamm, whom we met during our inquiries. He and his father before him have been involved in monitoring the effects of acidity on the soil and on forests since 1927. They have expressed deep concern about the mounting evidence of the effects of acid rain on trees in Scandinavia.

The Minister referred to the costs involved in tackling the problem and said that £1·5 billion was a lot of money. However, as hon. Members have pointed out, that would be spread over 10 years. When the British people were asked in a MORI survey two years ago about the cost of tackling pollution, 56 per cent. replied that they would be prepared to pay an extra penny in the pound on income tax if that would result in a reduction in pollution. We would be asking them to do much less than that. We are speaking of a small increase in electricity prices.

The Minister also made great play with the 40 per cent. fall in emissions and seemed to suggest that this and preceding Governments had done a great job in reducing emissions by that amount. In fact, the reduction has occurred mainly because of deindustrialisation, massive unemployment and the closure of factories and smelters —in other words, because of what has happened to our economy — rather than as the result of a positive programme on the part of Government.

While this debate has been in progress, a meeting has been held elsewhere in this building by Greenpeace, whose members have been expressing the need for a co-ordinated attack by the European countries on the problem of acid rain, and they have today presented a petition signed by parliamentarians from nine countries. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who has now returned from that meeting to his place, tells me that many people there pointed out that unless urgent action was taken trees, lakes and buildings would be damaged beyond recall.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who speaks for the Liberal party on environmental matters, I met the former Swedish Liberal Minister for the Environment. This was during our assembly this year in Bournemouth, at which we debated acid rain. He underlined to us the fears of his countrymen and pointed out the dangers to international relations, and in particular to Anglo-Scandinavian relations, if urgent action was not taken to deal with acid rain.

In my six years in this House I do not recall being involved in a more rewarding piece of work than this inquiry into acid rain. It was rewarding for several reasons. For example, not only was a thorough and intense report produced, but the inquiry was personally enlightening. The final report is well researched and competent. Much of the credit for that must go to our Chairman, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who was a hard taskmaster, and to our scientific advisers, to whom reference has been made. I wish also to pay tribute to the work of the clerks, particularly Mr. Andre Gren, who is recovering from a serious road accident. His work made our task much easier.

As the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) said, all the members of the Select Committee approached the inquiry with their own views and sometimes their own prejudices. However, we were able to reach unanimous conclusions on what must be done to tackle the environmental catastrophe that is referred to, perhaps sometimes misleadingly, as acid rain. Such cross-party consensus and co-operation is rare in this place and when it occurs it is welcome and rewarding.

My only disappointment concerns the Government's cavalier response to the most important of the Select Committees' findings and proposals. It is not good enough for the Under-Secretary of State and others to talk about 17 of the 19 recommendations and proposals having been accepted, when the two most crucial recommendations were rejected out of hand. It is cold comfort to be told that many of our conclusions have been endorsed, when the central recommendations have been repudiated.

In a nutshell, the Select Committee asked itself what was the major cause of acid rain, who was the main culprit and what could be done to minimise the appalling damage that is being inflicted on our forests, lakes and buildings. The Committee put most of the blame at the door of the Central Electricity Generating Board. It identified its emissions of sulphur and nitrogen dioxide as a major factor. It recommended a series of measures designed to reduce emission and to clean up the atmosphere. It said that the Government should join immediately the 30 per cent. club of nations, which has already committed itself to reduce its emissions by one third. It asked for a commitment to the EC draft directive, which seeks a reduction in emissions of 60 per cent. by 1995.

These two recommendations were the guts of our conclusions and they are the two which the Government have rejected. In doing so, the Government have forgone

[Mr. David Alton]

the right to describe themselves as an Adminstration who are concerned about the environment or the quality of life. Instead, they will earn themselves a place in the history books as a Government of cushy complacency. Their decision to delay will lead to irreversible damage and they will be judged as lacking responsibility and wisdom. In the case of this Government, how true are the words of William Blake, who wrote:

"A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees."

A wise man or a wise Government would not have said complacently that he or they would await more research. Nor would they have relied on the specious argument of an interested party. A wise man would have invested in an insurance policy at the very least. Instead, the Government have allowed themselves to be wooed by Sir Walter Marshall and Peter Chester of the CEGB. The board's propaganda machine has been working at full capacity to disseminate disinformation. In the process, it has conned the Government.

That is to take a kind view. An unkinder view is that, as an appointee of the Prime Minister, Sir Walter was only too anxious to say the things that his mistress bid him say. Either way, the outcome amounts to much the same thing. The CEGB has been able to avoid the cost of tackling the problem of acid rain and the Government have been able to avoid a major public works programme. In the meantime, the environment continues to be poisoned.

In contrast with Her Majesty's Government and the CEGB, the members of the Select Committee, myself included, believed by the time that our inquiries and research had been completed that there was no doubt that introgen oxide and SO_2 lay at the heart of the problems. I recall vividly — perhaps this is the factor that convinced me more than anything else—the depressing walk that the members of the Committee took in Germany's Black forest. It was there that we saw evidence with our own eyes that convinced us that urgent action was needed. We saw that nearly every fir is diseased. Officials in the state of Baden-Wurtenberg told us that half the trees in the Black forest were diseased beyond recall. For any of us who had lingering doubts about the catastrophic effects of acid rain, the Black forest underlined the need for urgent and co-ordinated European action.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): How does the hon. Gentleman explain that the level of sulphuric acid fallout in the Black forest is lower than that in the Norwegian forests, which are thriving?

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated what I was about to say. He has given a good illustration of the complexity of the problem. Contributory factors, working together, cause acid rain, which is itself a generic term. Since the mid-1970s, the silver firs in the Black forest have been dying in their thousands. Since 1981, there has been a dramatic escalation, with spruce firs and deciduous trees also being affected. Even nursery saplings are withering.

Yet as long ago as 1972, at a specially convened conference in Stockholm, the impending disaster was predicted by scientists. However, Governments throughout Europe complacently stood by. Trees have died while the Government have recommended more research. Acid rain has been sweeping across central Europe's forests like a cyclone of death.

The psychological impact on a country such as Germany, where a third of the land is covered with woodland, is perhaps difficult for a Briton fully to appreciate. Sadly, only 8 per cent. of the United Kingdom remains as woodland. The forests are central to German culture and heritage, which makes the economic and ecological considerations even more mind-boggling. About 250,000 jobs in Baden-Wurtenberg alone depend upon forestry. In addition, the disappearance of trees will fundamentally alter the ecology of western Europe. The forests protect ground water and retain rainwater. They preserve the fertility of the soil and they provide protection against erosion. They purify the air and influence local climatic conditions. Wildlife depends on the forests for its survival.

It is obvious to even the most casual observer that for many of the trees it is already too late. A walk in the Black forest is like a walk in a graveyard. The skeletons of the trees that are already dead leave no room for scepticism about the seriousness of the situation.

The dangerous levels of European pollution are threatening our buildings as well as our trees. Here is a short tale of two cities. At the top of Cologne cathedral — Cologne is Liverpool's twin city — the chief stonemason described to the members of the Select Committee how 67 stonemasons are employed constantly in replacing corroded stone. He told us that some stone has been replaced four times in 20 years. That gives the lie to the view which others have proffered to the Minister that it is only medieval cathedrals or buildings that are being affected and that the effects are cumulative. Stone that has been in place for only 20 years is having to be replaced regularly in Cologne. The chief stonemason said that the cathedral will soon be a replica of a replica.

In Liverpool, the Anglican cathedral is facing a bill of hundreds of thousands of pounds to replace all the copper sheeting that covers the roof. The building of the cathedral started at the turn of the century and it has only recently been completed. The fact that the building is already in danger demonstrates how much of our heritage is at risk. Great buildings such as St. Paul's cathedral, the Palace of Westminster, Lincoln cathedral and York minster are being badly damaged as a result of acid rain. The dangers to our heritage are phenomenal.

A constituent of mine — Mr. John Hulton of Wavertree—put it well when he commented to me in a letter:

"Cleopatra's needle has suffered more erosion from London pollution in the past 80 years by the River Thames than in 3,000 by the Nile."

Connected with the problem of the effects of pollution is the question of cost. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State, or the Minister who is to reply, will say who is to meet the cost of putting right the damage, especially to our buildings. How can we go cap in hand to the European Community and claim to be good Europeans when we are turning our backs on its draft directive which asks for a 60 per cent. reduction in emissions?

Apart from the effects on trees and buildings, the members of the Select Committee saw horrifying evidence in Sweden that great damage is being done by acid rain to lakes and aquatic life. In southern Sweden, over 18,000 of 20,000 lakes have been acidified. According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which has recently undertaken a study of the effects of acid rain and its implications for bird conservation,

"for the first time in Britain a connection has been shown between reduced bird populations and acidic run-off of water from certain upland areas."

The society's study was undertaken in Wales with the co-operation of the Welsh water authority. In its conclusions, which came too late to be submitted to the Select Committee, it states:

"The Government, in responding to the Select Committee, has so far only pledged to continue existing levels of research. This is quite inadequate."

Faced with all this evidence, the CEGB, aided and abetted by the Department of the Environment, has decided vaguely to aim for a reduction in emissions of 30 per cent. from 1980 levels by the end of the next decade. There will also be some more temporising research.

Faced with the same evidence as the CEGB, West Germany, by contrast, has plunged into a massive programme. Its Government have made available between 10 billion and 15 billion deutschmarks for filter equipment in power stations. The Japanese, as usual, have stolen a march on everybody else. Japan is the only country producing sophisticated environmental technology. However, German industry is now catching up fast. By 1988, German-made desulphurisation plants will be in position in three quarters of all German power stations, massively reducing emissions.

Preparations are now also in hand in Germany for the removal of nitrogen oxide. That work will involve planning, erection and construction, and, as the hon. Member for South Shields, (Dr. Clark) said, it will involve the creation of thousands of jobs. No doubt that is heresy in the view of this Government, but it would be spending to social advantage, not just digging holes and filling them up again, as is so often the case with the job creation programmes and youth training schemes, and the other irrelevances on which the Government spend money.

The German Government are also taking urgent action to introduce lead-free petrol. That will be compulsory by January 1986. We have simply announced our intention to travel the same road by the end of the decade. We are falling hopelessly behind. The Government are now showing all the hallmarks of an insular and xenophobic Government. It is all summed up in the attitude of some of the more hard-line Conservative Members who seem to believe in the philosophy of do unto others before they do you.

British scientists have been haggling and arguing about conflicting theories. Meanwhile, Germany has acted to reduce pollution regardless of whether it is the sole cause of forests dying. It is irrelevant whether it is all the fault of SO_2 or nitrogen oxide. The fact is that we should be tackling the problem of emissions now.

Unilateral action by Germany or any other country in tackling air pollution will never be enough. Only 50 per cent. of their pollution is home grown; the rest is imported from neighbouring states. Pollutants know no frontiers and observe no customs posts. The Black Forest receives more pollutants from foreign sources than from internally generated emissions — 32 per cent. from the German Federal Republic, 32 per cent. from France, and the rest from countries such as Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Britain. German scientists told us that pollution of the air in Czechoslovakia has become so bad that children had to be evacuated from one border area to a spa town for recuperation.

Clearly, a concerted European approach — East and West — to the problem is needed. Britain, as the largest emitter of SO_2, must take the problem particularly seriously. Britain also needs a Department of the Environment which has a commitment to safeguarding our heritage and environment. It should be separate from the rambling empire of the present Department, which is really only a Ministry for housing and local government — or should I say the abolition of local government? Such a Department should seek to champion an improvement in the quality of life, not become a defender of the status quo. In its present form, the Department is a willing accomplice and a fellow conspirator with those responsible for this calamity.

Acid rain is part of the environmental catastrophe facing the world. There are others. For instance, one in 10 of the estimated 250,000 different plant species are said to be rare or threatened; 320 species of mammal are in extreme danger of extinction, and so are 400 species of bird. Forests are disappearing from the humid tropics in Africa, Asia and Latin America at a rate of 11 million hectares a year. Great monuments such as the Acropolis are disintegrating through the effects of man-made pollutants.

Today the House should simply try to imagine a forest where half the trees are dead or dying, lakes that are so badly polluted that fish can no longer survive, or great buildings that have survived the pillage of sackings and war which are now crumbling from the effects of pollution. We should simply imagine all that and worse and then ask what kind of a country it is and what kind of values allow that kind of grisly fantasy to become a nightmare reality.

12.23 pm

Mr. T. H. H. Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I have just heard an extremely alarmist speech and one that seems to believe in solving problems simply by throwing money at them in the hope that some will be solved. It may be that after money has been thrown at the problems none will be solved.

I must congratulate all the members of the Select Committee on the work that they put into their report and the conclusions that they drew. It is a good thing that at least 17 recommendations have been accepted. The recommendation that I quarrel with is probably that with which the Government quarrel, too, which is contained in paragraphs 196 and 197. It deals with the EEC proposal for a 60:40:40 ratio.

The EEC draft does not call for an overall national reduction of 60 per cent., but for a reduction from large combustion plants of 15 mW and over. Exactly what is the Committee referring to? Is it talking about an overall reduction, or is it calling on the CEGB virtually to reduce the lot? If so, it could be extremely costly for the CEGB over the years and extremely costly both for industrial and domestic purchasers of electricity in the United Kingdom.

It has been said, rightly, that the factors involved here are a combination of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, hydrocarbons, ozone and many others. The report rightly says that until further examinations have taken place the real cause will not be known and that much additional research will be required.

One of the conclusions that I have reached is that the Select Committee, in coming to its conclusions in paragraphs 196 and 197, has not taken into account the facts that have been adduced by the evidence before the

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Committee. For example, let me refer to the good work of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman). In paragraph 585 he says:

"If that is right, and I know you have got to cover yourselves, am I right in saying that the problem that Germany faces with its trees, and Scandinavia, will not in any way be alleviated by de-sulphurisation programmes?"

Professor Last, speaking on behalf of the Natural Environment Research Council, said:

"I have to give a guarded answer in that I believe that the answer is probably no, it will not be helped".

That serves to answer the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) who talked about the state of forests in western Germany. It is not sulphur dioxide by itself which is the problem.

In paragraph 586 Dr. Miller said:

"if they were to remove sulphur from the atmosphere, the German trees would still die."

It is extraordinary that members of the Select Committee, who studied the evidence extremely carefully, did not come to the conclusion which was in evidence. I am referring to the evidence given by representatives of the NERC because the Select Committee says that that is independent evidence from people who have no axe to grind. Dr. Bowman also says:

"The major manifestation of damage to the forests occurred in Germany and we have said that we believe that it is mainly on ozone problems."

In paragraph 463, Dr. Binns of the Forestry Commission refers to that, saying that he did not see any great damage occurring in the United Kingdom as yet. It is an extremely complicated problem which must be properly worked out.

Mr. Chapman: I accept my hon. Friend's quotations, but he will find that we concluded that long-range sulphur dioxide was not the principal cause of damage and destruction to trees, although it was responsible for the destruction of fish in Scandinavia. We stressed that there were different forms of pollutant and that we believed that ozone was the principal cause of the 58 per cent. damage to trees in the Black Forest, some of which we saw. My hon. Friend has quoted Professor Last whom I know well and respect deeply, but we also took evidence from other distinguished scientists in this and other countries.

Mr. Skeet: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. Paragraph 84 of the report indeed refers to ozone. But if the Committee had considered this aspect carefully it would not have jumped to the conclusion in paragraphs 196 and 197 calling for a 60 per cent. reduction, which would be extremely onerous for the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who opened the debate with an extremely good speech, referred to the effect of sulphur dioxide on concrete. Paragraph 240 may have escaped my hon. Friend's attention. In that paragraph Dr. Everett stated:

"The damage done to concrete from the SO_2 levels in the environment is very little, because the SO_2 that gets into concrete is tied up very quickly to form a compound called Ettringite which is insoluble in concrete, and once it is formed the SO_2 plays no further part."

Many people in this country are concerned about our heritage, much of which is built with concrete or limestone. But limestone takes many forms. Sulphur dioxide has little effect on hard limestone but soft limestone may well be destroyed over the years. Despite the commissioning of the three Trentside power stations at High Marnham, West Burton and Cottam, sulphur dioxide levels in Lincoln have fallen steadily. The levels in Lincoln in 1970 were three times the levels around those stations, as Dr. Gerald Gibbs points out.

I am not saying that there has not been destruction by sulphur dioxide or acid rain. That may have started the damage, which may now be continuing because other plants are producing other corrosive substances. For instance, power generation in London has almost ceased. Sulphur dioxide emissions have fallen from 55,000 tonnes in 1975 to 3,000 tonnes in 1983 without any reduction in the rate of corrosion. It is extraordinary that, despite the abatement of sulphur dioxide emissions, corrosion has increased in some areas. We heard in an earlier debate that tall chimney stacks were adopted to reduce urban concentrations of pollutants, but that the emission of sulphur dioxide at great velocity into the higher atmosphere transported the pollution abroad. If there was so much damage in Scandinavia as a result, there should be less damage in the United Kingdom. Indeed, that was part of the tall-stack policy, to prevent urban concentrations.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Does not that account for the greatly increased acid rain damage in Scandinavia?

Mr. Skeet: Yes, but only 2·1 per cent. of the sulphur dioxide leaving the United Kingdom actually falls on Norway, to be added to the large amount of indigenous sulphur dioxide already there. We need to know what chemical changes take place in the atmosphere in transit between the United Kingdom and Norway. The sulphur dioxide may be transformed by ozone and hydrocarbons in such a way as to produce other effects. After careful thought, I have come to the conclusion that in coming years rather more research is required than the type of research now being carried out.

The problems of Scandinavia are of the greatest interest to us. There are two ways of approaching them. We could reduce our emission of sulphur dioxide. According to the Watt committee, to reduce sulphur deposited in Norway by one ton Britain would have to reduce its output by 46 tons but Norway would have to reduce its emissions by only two tons. Should we not therefore call upon Norway to make a bigger contribution than we do? Hon. Members have all talked about the comity of nations and about relations between the two countries, and I fully understand what has been said. However, we should try to measure the relative burdens of both countries.

My hon. Friend the Minister has told us that since 1970 the amount of sulphur dioxide emitted in the United Kingdom has fallen by 37 per cent. He did not say what the reasons were. However, if emissions have been reduced here, their effect on Norway must have been reduced too. In that case, how is it that the amount of corrosion there and the acidity of the lakes have increased? Other factors may be involved that we do not understand. The Government may be right to say that there should be broader research before we spring to conclusions and cast money in all directions.

We are endeavouring to find a cure for cancer, but many of the charities that exist in order to collect money for that purpose cannot find suitable projects to spend it

on, because the leads are not available. Throwing money at a problem may not produce results. What is required is an effective lead.

I am no friend of sulphur dioxide or of nitrogen oxide. Something must be done. However, I am probably a better friend to the miners in Britain, who want us to use a little more coal, than some Opposition Members who are creating further difficulties for their brethren.

We must consider the possible consequences of pursuing the recommendations of the Select Committee. The major recommendation has wisely been rejected by the Government. It would affect the quantity and quality of coal burnt in the United Kingdom and ultimately have implications for the refiners of high sulphur crudes imported into the United Kingdom. It would involve the industry in the use of expensive technology immediately, at considerable cost to the consumers of electricity. The Liberals are quite prepared to forget the consumers, but I think that their views should be put forward in the House.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Skeet: Yes, in a moment.

There would also be further environmental problems connected with the disposal of waste products. Comparisons between the United Kingdom and the Continent are of dubious value. Trees on the Continent are subject to different stresses from those in the United Kingdom, because of different meteorological conditions. Furthermore, because of the long lead-time involved, it is not feasible to switch to the increased use of nuclear power.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that one can anticipate the environmental consequences of a policy by making sure that there is an assessment of environmental impact before rather than after the event? The assessment is then available for debate. It may be too late now to deal with problems that are the legacy of the fact that, in the past 20 years, Governments have paid inadequate attention to the environment.

Mr. Skeet: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. There has been a reduction of 37 per cent. since 1970, and we contemplate another 30 per cent. reduction in the coming years. Much of the destruction to which the hon. Gentleman refers is historic and dates from a time when conditions were extremely difficult.

The hon. Gentleman is unaware that there has been a considerable switch from coal and a restructuring of manufacturing industry which has retired some of the heavy and dirty users of coal. More nuclear-generated electricity is used—17 per cent. of the total—and more natural gas is used in the domestic sector. All of those factors are being overlooked. The hon. Gentleman is jumping to conclusions when the problem is imperfectly understood. The CEGB has brought in Northern Engineering Industries Ltd. to help it with some problems, much research is being undertaken and there have been many major reports. There have been countless reports, such as the Watt report, which I dare say the hon. Gentleman has read. If he had read them and the evidence in the Select Committee report, he would have come to a rather different conclusion.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I must have one more go at the hon. Gentleman. Is he trying to rewrite history and say that energy generation has been transferred to the nuclear sector for environmental reasons — that is clearly not true—or that the principal reason for the improvement in Britain is the decline in our industrial base, which started higher than anywhere else in Europe because of the industrial revolution? That is an accepted fact and does not result from the Government's awareness of environmental issues. The hon. Gentleman cannot adduce those developments as reasons for changes in our economic or energy circumstances.

Mr. Skeet: The hon. Gentleman is merely repeating himself and I have already answered him. I should be only too pleased to argue with him at full length outside the Chamber.

The production of sulphur dioxide is not proportionate to the deposition of sulphur. That was carefully shown by Dr. Holdgate in his evidence. Unless sulphur dioxide is attended by nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons, there will not necessarily be the depositions, either wet or dry, which cause the destruction complained of.

I should like to consider two processes which have been referred to. The first is pressurised fluidised bed combustion. I am a great supporter of it. It is being operated by the National Coal Board at Selby and has been active in several manufacturing plants, but there are difficulties in scaling it up for a full power station. However, a new technology brings in further problems. A 2,000 mW pressurised fluidised bed combustion station consuming 5 million tonnes of coal at 2 per cent. sulphur content per annum would require between 1·09 million tonnes and 1·28 million tonnes of limestone per annum as compared with a gypsum flue gas desulphurisation project of only 320,000 tonnes to achieve a similar removal of sulphur dioxide.

It is clear, therefore, that there is an environmental problem of some magnitude in disposing of the waste. What are we to do with all of the calcium sulphate that cannot be used on the market? I have said that I do not expect to find a full sized fluidised bed combustion plant in operation before the year 2000 because the Grimethorpe reactor has erosion problems in its tube banks and is having difficulty with its turbine blades.

There is a considerable chlorine element in British coal which causes corrosion problems.

Mr. Hardy: There is an earlier opportunity for the fluidised bed as there is considerable and proper pressure on the Government for the development of combined heat and power for district heating. Many right hon. and hon. Members believe that such schemes should proceed urgently. There is no technological problem to their development on the basis of fluidised bed. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Skeet: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that point. The Government are considering the number of schemes available, but until heat loads have built up the operators will probably start on an oil-fired operation and eventually transfer the system to a power station. One is looking years ahead, not for immediate solutions. I think that the schemes are good. They exist in Scandinavia, Germany and elsewhere, but we have few examples of them in the United Kingdom.

I turn to flue gas desulphurisation which takes place after combustion. Processes are available, such as the Wellman-Lord process. However, again we are faced with

[Mr. Skeet]

a high effluent. Limestone is used to a lesser extent than in the AD2000 programme. The sludge will have to be disposed of. Caustic soda is used, and sodium sulphate will have to be dumped. Calcium chloride will have to be disposed of in some way. Moreover, the consequential problems to the environment which are created by the new methods are not as easy to solve as some hon. Members suggest.

We have not solved the major problems that we face. The Minister is right to resist the proposal of the Select Committee that he should go ahead with an untargeted programme and reduce sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. It is perfectly right that he should accept all the other recommendations and go ahead with monitoring arrangements to find out the concentrations of SO_2 and nitrogen oxide and, through research, where the real causes lie. But he should not be panicked into spending billions of pounds now on something which may not be satisfactory over time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I should draw attention to the fact that about 10 hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Unless speeches are briefer, one or two hon. Members will be disappointed.

12.47 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I shall take up some points raised by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet), who sounded like the hon. Member for the Central Electricity Generating Board. As a Labour Member of the Select Committee, I add my voice to the tributes paid to our technical advisers, the Clerks who served our Committee, the way in which the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) chaired the Committee, and the way in which we managed to change a Committee of sceptics into an all-party Committee committed to action to reduce the problem of acid rain.

It was not a difficult task to reach a unanimous conclusion and not to be separated by party political barriers. The weight of evidence in Germany, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom was overwhelmingly that action was needed quickly if we were not to continue to pollute Scandinavia, West Germany and other parts of western Europe, and if we in the United Kingdom were not to suffer in the sort of crisis that has occurred in central Europe and Scandinavia. We should learn from what has happened there and take action before it is too late.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North will regret many of his words when that area starts to suffer from pollution. The one argument which he, the Minister and the CEGB produced in favour of inaction was that further research was needed. They seek to throw money at the problem. I shall deal with cost shortly. They want conclusive proof provided scientifically. They want a linear correlation between a reduction in sulphur in one place and a reduction in damage by pollution in another. If they want that before they act, they will never act, because they will never get that evidence. It is impossible to produce such evidence.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North, the Minister and the CEGB, including its scientist Mr. Peter Chester, purposely ignored the fact that such pollution is cumulative. It builds up over many years. Even if we reduced emissions today, pollution would continue tomorrow and would become worse by next year, because we would still be emitting sulphur and nitrogen which would be added to the pollutants already in the atmosphere.

In Scandinavia, pollutants emitted at a low level—they have been reduced—during an entire winter build up in the snow. When the snow melts, the accumulated acidity destroys the fish and eggs in lakes and rivers. In Germany, we saw the results of research which had been conducted on cross-sections of trees and on soils, which showed the cumulative build-up of acidification.

From what the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North said, one would believe that the sulphur emitted from our power stations does us good and that it is not really a problem. It used to pollute the atmosphere, vegetation and lakes, but we built the high stacks to take care of that. Why did we do that if the emissions are not harmful? We did it to disperse the emissions into the atmosphere. As a consequence of that policy, the sulphur is being exported to Germany and Scandinavia, but it is still landing in Britain, and it will remain a problem in Britain. As hon. Members said, Britain is fortunate in that few emissions from other countries fall on our land. We are responsible for our pollution, but as it increases—there are signs of it already in Cumbria, Scotland and other parts of the country—we shall face difficulties similar to those in other countries.

The arguments are similar to those used when we first discussed the possibility of smoking causing lung cancer. People said, "We want conclusive scientific evidence," but that has not been produced to this day. We still do not know what causes cancer, but we accept that cigarette smoking contributes significantly to the problem. That is exactly the sort of evidence, in terms of statistics, correlations and research, that we have about sulphur and nitrogen damaging the environment. If we do not take action now, it will be too late for the British environment. The smoking patient—our environment—will be dead.

No cost-benefit analysis can show conclusively that if we reduce sulphur emissions crop yields will increase. It would be extremely difficult, in the period during which research would be necessary, to assess the effects of sulphur and nitrogen emissions on crop yield. However, the National Farmers Union and others have said that there is no doubt that there is a reduction. Research shows that there are problems with crop yield and the corrosion of metals. Research has not yet been conducted on human health, but must we wait until a child is killed on a road before we install a zebra crossing——

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little carried away. The problem with health is not that the solution of heavy metals in water is not well understood—it is recognised as a danger—but that the acidity of water derived from deposition as a contribution to that problem is so minimal as to be far less important that other sources.

Mr. Roberts: There is some dispute about that. I accept the Minister's statement that acidification from emissions of sulphur and nitrogen into the atmosphere is only one factor. In its report the Committee did not fall into the trap, as Sir Walter Marshall accused us of doing, of saying that all pollution is caused by sulphur emitted

from Britain's power stations. There is a combination of complicated factors. Equally, to suggest that we do not know whether any significant benefit would accrue from reducing sulphur and nitrogen emissions from power stations is to mislead the nation and the House. However, that is what the CEGB tried to do when it gave evidence to the Select Committee, and through its public statements and press releases.

Mr. Alton: I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman is saying. To underline the point, is it not the case that everybody is out of step but ourselves? Why cannot this country recognise what the countries in the 30 per cent. club have recognised, as have other countries in Europe which recognise and support the EEC draft directive, which is that it must be good for the health of our citizens to take urgent action now?

Mr. Roberts: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We were at one on the Committee, and I am at one with him in what he has just said.

I hope that what I say in simple terms about acid rain is not misunderstood. After listening to the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North, one would think that the CEGB did not emit nitrogen dioxide from its power stations, which the retrofitting of the power stations would deal with. I shall deal with the pressurised fluid bed combustion system and with the retrofitting of power stations.

Acid rain is created by the emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide when either coal or oil is burnt in power stations, industry or motor cars. The generally accepted contribution of each to the acidity of our rain is that 70 per cent. of the pollution is caused by the sulphur dioxide and 30 per cent. by the nitrogen oxide. The United Kingdom is western Europe's largest producer of sulphur dioxide. We emit one fifth of the region's 20 million tonnes per year. Historically, we have always been the leading European polluter. In 1970 we were producing almost one third of west Europe's SO_2 because of our dependence on coal and oil and our refusal to clean emissions.

As a result of North sea gas, the recession and several other factors, there has been a reduction in our emissions, but that has not come about as a result of action or positive decision by the Government, the CEGB or industry. Although we have reduced our emissions by the amount that is claimed by the Government, we are still the largest polluter in western Europe and probably emit more than anybody else except the Soviet Union. Research and political pressure in Europe have led to action and the consequences that we have seen in our environment. There is a need for action here, but we stand isolated.

Countries in the EEC—France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Denmark and Luxembourg — and in Europe outside the EEC — Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway and Finland—have all taken the action which the British Government refused to take, and have done so on the same scientific evidence that is before the British Government and the Select Committee. The Select Committee made recommendations hoping that the Government would look at the evidence objectively and become good Europeans and good internationalists.

At one stage the Government were on the verge of taking the necessary action and wondered what to do. The Prime Minister was under pressure from the West German Chancellor and others in the EEC, so she called a meeting at Chequers to consider the issue. Along came Sir Walter Marshall and Peter Chester, among others, and the result was catastrophic. It was probably the dirtiest dirty weekend in history. They came to the conclusion that no action should be taken and that public expenditure was not justified because they agreed with what the CEGB said then, and what the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North has been saying this morning.

That decision was not only wrong, but politically inept, because it would be relatively cheap to join the 30 per cent. club, as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) said. The sum of £1·5 billion spread over 10 years represents a farthing a day on the average electricity bill of £200 a year. That would mean a bill of £201 a year instead of £200 a year.

Mr. Skeet: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to save money to make it available for scientific research, will he consider the fact that if the miners' strike had not happened we could have saved ourselves, in Scargill's estimate, £5 billion? That money could have been used for this purpose.

Mr. Roberts: I am in favour of a negotiated end to the dispute. I hope that what the hon. Gentleman says about the cost of the dispute is heard by the Secretary of State for Energy, the Prime Minister and the chairman of the NCB. Perhaps we could then get round the conference table.

When the hon. Gentleman spoke in the debate, he mentioned his so-called support—while attacking coal and wanting it to remain dirty—for the miners, the NUM and the coal industry. I do not think that we want that sort of support. He and other Conservative Members mentioned the alternative of nuclear energy, which is an important issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard) attended a fringe meeting during the Labour party conference. She heard the first speaker, Mr. Peter Heathfield, but left before the second speaker—myself—was able to reply. I am not surprised that she formed the wrong view of the position when she spoke to the party conference. I do not believe for one minute that it is in the interests of the coal industry, the NUM or the miners to allow coal to be burnt in a way that pollutes the atmosphere.

In 1982, 14 per cent. of our energy was supplied by nuclear power and the remainder by coal. During the strike, of course, the remainder has been supplied by coal and expensive oil. We are led to believe, through leak and innuendo, that the Government want to expand the nuclear base to 33 per cent. I believe that the closure of pits has something to do with that, as has the Government's and the CEGB's response to the Select Committee report. If the miners cannot strike because nuclear energy is providing the bulk of our electricity, that will make the problem easier for the Government. Expansion depends on the completion of the Sizewell inquiry. In the meantime, the Government are happy to have coal stigmatised as an acid rain producer.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is not a fair point. The hon. Gentleman's views are not shared by the fuel and power committee of the TUC, which wrote to the Secretary of State for Energy saying that, although it was indeed a serious problem, more research was needed and that

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specific emission limits were probably not yet in order. Therefore, the matter is not quite as simple as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Roberts: I have disagreed with the TUC before, and no doubt will do so again. Similarly, I have disagreed with the NUM, and will do so again. On this matter, the TUC is misguided. I do not put the responsibility for this Machiavellian approach of wanting to develop nuclear power and not to take action on acid rain at the door of the Department of the Environment or the Minister, but at the door of the CEGB, the Department of Energy, Sir Walter Marshall and, perhaps, the Prime Minister. If we act now to prevent acid rain pollution, there will be no justification to move further towards nuclear power on the ground that coal-fired power stations are begining to destroy the environment.

Another issue is involved. The NCB wants to develop super-pits in the midlands using computerised machinery to minimise labour costs. If that happens, there will be a large-scale closure programme in Scotland, Wales and the north-east and the coal reserves will be sterilised. We will never again get hold of those reserves, because the pits will have been closed. If the United Kingdom joins the 30 per cent. club, that will reduce SO_2 emissions by installing the filters necessary in the coal-burning power stations. That may be too expensive for smaller industries, which will have to use coal with a lower sulphur content. The Welsh and Scottish coalfields produce more coal with a lower suphur content than any other area in the United Kingdom.

Clean coal means that the whole basis on which the economic or uneconomic pit is assessed will alter, and that is very important. It is not those who are advocating the retrofitting of power stations and the production of coal so that it does not create acid rain who are attacking the coal mining industry and the NUM; it is those who take the opposite view who are doing so. If the Government and the CEGB plan an expansion of nuclear energy, jobs will go not only at power stations but in the coal mining communities.

The fluidised bed combustion system which is being developed, and which I hope will continue to be developed, if successful, could be put into new power stations. Even if it is developed to the full, it cannot economically be put into existing power stations. Therefore, there must be flue gas desulphurisation. That is what the Select Committee recommended for all our large power stations. By doing so, without turning to the small industries such as cement and gas, we could achieve the 60 per cent. reduction and fall in line with the EEC directive. We could certainly join the 30 per cent. club.

A question raised by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, was not answered by the Minister. How do the Government envisage achieving the broad policy aim of a 30 per cent. reduction in notional SO_2 emissions from 1980 levels by the late 1990s? The Government do not tell us in their response to the report. They do not explain exactly how they will implement their policies. They should do so quickly.

The Government's approach is "We do not know. We need more research. It is not proven. If we spend the money, perhaps that will not result in saving the environment." That is an excuse, a cover and a blank. The Government have accepted the recommendations which do not cost anything. The ones that required expenditure were rejected. The environment in Britain will suffer as a result and the cost to the community, private individuals, the public purse and Britain's reputation in the world will be tremendous. The sum of £1·5 million over 10 years, a farthing a day increase in electricity costs for the average household, will be considered a small price to pay when the cost of the damage of not taking action now is assessed in a few years' time.

1.7 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on his speech, and all the members on the Committee on their report. I endorse much of what was said by my hon. Friend the Minister, in the sense that he was right to remind the House that over many years the United Kingdom, and this Government in particular, has had quite a good record of achievement in combating the problems of pollution. It is not perfect, but it is quite good. One has only to look at the decision to take lead out of petrol by the early 1990s, the gradual and welcome implementation of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to see that, though not a complete agenda of progress in dealing with pollution, none the less the Government have a solid record behind them.

I believe, as do many of my hon. Friends, that the party of which I am a member and the Government whom I support can and should do more, and should do better and act more urgently. I have one comment on what my hon. Friend the Minister said when he talked about the need to wait for a more convincing cost-benefit model to decide the balance between the economic costs of certain forms of action and the environmental benefits. If the Government wait until such a virgin and youthful model is forthcoming, they may wait too long. There are preferable ways forward, to which I shall refer.

"Acid deposition", as it is more correctly described, has become, whether we wish it or not, a litmus test of the Government's good faith in dealing with air pollution. It may not be admirable that that is so, but it is the politcal reality. Limiting air pollution must be the next main area of environmental progress by this country.

It was reassuring to read in paragraph 1.2 of the Government's reply:

"The United Kingdom believes in the principle of good neighbourliness".

I hope that our friends and partners on the Continent will take that as a sincere statement.

Equally, it is good to learn that the Government, as they said in paragraph 1.3,

"will, however, continue to encourage the development of new technologies"

to deal with some of these problems of pollution. All that is to the good, and I am glad that it is on the record, but there are a number of worries that arise about that broad statement which need to be underlined. I have one or two worries of a kind which need to be spelt out a little.

First, do the Government define what they choose to call

"environmentally effective and economically feasible policies"

in a way which means something, or is it just vacuous language? I hope that it is not the latter, because, clearly, if we are talking about environmental policy, we want

something that is effective and economically feasible; we do not want the cost grossly to outweigh the environmental benefits. I am prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt on those points, but more evidence is needed to substantiate the Government's position.

Secondly, if the United Kingdom is making such good progress, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, with the reduction of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, why is it not possible—I ask this in all innocence—for us to join the 30 per cent. club, which, after all, is an objective which has 1993 attached to it—some little time away—when it seems that we should probably be qualified to join that club at least on terms comparable with those of some of the other nations by that stage as a result of the progress that we are making in parallel and independently of any such commitment?

Thirdly, and this is the point that I wish to stress most, surely the best way for the Government to encourage the development of the relevant technologies, which is an important part of the limitation of power station emissions, would be to follow the recommendation of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution in paragraph 5.96 of its report, which is relevant to today's discussion. It said that certain of the technological options already available should be tested on an experimental basis on a couple of our large, new coal-fired stations for a trial period over the following five years to see which works best.

That would not involve the CEGB in extensive and costly retrofitting for all its existing coal-fired stations; nor would it prejudge the outcome of further scientific and technological progress which may be made. It would be more than just a token of the Government's good faith. It would enhance the Government's credibility in the eyes of the public, and especially in the eyes of our partners on the Continent. I am thinking of the Germans and Scandinavians. I hope that the Government will be able to respond positively, if not today, in the near future, to that point in the Royal Commission's report.

There are one or two small tangential points which I should like to mention briefly. I welcome the Government's positive response to the Select Committee's recommendations on air pollution monitoring. We shall never control and limit air pollution from any source adequately if our data base and monitoring facilities are inadequate. Much of the Government's approach over the years has relied on what we choose to call the "best practicable means". That sounds sensible, and allegedly it can do more to protect the environment than legally enforceable maximum limits, which is more the continental or American approach to such problems.

If we are to sustain that position, which is almost a theological one in British government, we must be able to point to instances where our approach has enabled us to do better than the alternative method of dealing with those matters. It would be useful for the House and some of our more dubious continental partners if, at the end of the debate, or on another occasion, the Minister could provide some useful and convincing examples of where our approach of the "best practicable means" has led to better results than the more legalistic continental approach.

Paragraph 3.65 of the Government's response appears to some of my hon. Friends to be a little negative and paradoxical in view of the Government's stated intention to achieve a 30 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by the end of the 1990s, compared with the 30 per cent. reduction by 1993 of the 30 per cent. club. Is the real reason for this discrepancy that the CEGB is now confident of having its new and better combustion technologies beginning to work by the end of the 1990s rather than by the early 1990s? That would seem a plausible explanation for the discrepancy between the two dates.

If agreement with our Community partners can be reduced to a reasonably simple and minimal area of disagreement, it is surely worth considering whether our policy is absolutely right. Perhaps it boils down to a seven-year difference in target date, to a methodological difference between the best practical means and legal maxima, to the problem of there being a continuing scientific dispute — which will probably continue ad infinitum; if we wait for scientists to agree on every point we will wait for ever—and to the political point, which has not been mentioned in today's debate.

It is clear that the whole issue raises extremely difficult matters to do with the unequal sharing of costs and benefits. At present, our partners have the dubious privilege of getting the effects of our invisible export in the shape of certain forms of air pollution, whereas we get the benefit of not having to finance the costs of limiting those. If we followed the lines suggested by the Select Committee, the United Kingdom would pay more, relatively speaking, and our partners would benefit more, relatively speaking, and that must be considered in a Community context.

The Government have it in mind to bring forward in due time a new comprehensive form of clean air legislation as the successor to the 1956 Act. That is all to the good, but I hope that when preparing that legislation Ministers and their advisers will pay attention to the need to include a suitable means of limiting air pollution emissions from hospitals and other forms of Crown property. This may sound a narrow point, but it is important symbolically.

At present, such places are excluded from the legal provisions, with the result that anybody walking past the Great Ormond street hospital for children on a fine summer day or looking across the river at St. Thomas's hospital can often see great plumes of noxious smoke and fumes emanating from their coal-fired boilers, simply because those places do not fall even within the provisions of the 1956 Act. I hope that that loophole will be closed.

In making preparations for subsequent air pollution legislation, I hope that the Government will give a favourable response to the idea that the Department of the Environment should truly become principally a Department of the Environment, because there is no other institutional body in Whitehall which has exactly that remit and responsibility.

In that context, I hope that the Government will move towards the establishment, soon after the legislation comes into force, of a new Her Majesty's pollution inspectorate, with real power behind it, specifically to see that environmental standards are monitored and met.

I welcome the progress that the Government have made so far, I congratulate the Select Committee on the work it has achieved, and I hope that Ministers and others concerned will recognise that a great deal remains to be done.

1.20 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): During the debate we have, quite rightly, been using the term "acid rain" to cover a number of different chemical

[Mr. Chris Smith]

and polluting effects. We use the term to describe various forms of air pollution, sometimes carried over many hundreds of miles both within Britain and from Britain to abroad, arising from the production of sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and hydrocarbons, both singly and in various chemical combinations. It is important for us to recognise, as the Select Committee does in its report, that there is no one chemical process at work. Indeed, there are several processes. They are caused by several different forms of pollution and it is necessary for us to tackle them all if we are satisfactorily to solve the problem.

The result of the pollution that is produced and carried is environmental damage elsewhere in Europe of untold proportions and the environmental damage which is beginning in Britain, which is extremely worrying. I do not think that any of the members of the Select Committee who went to West Germany to see the results of environmental pollution there will ever forget our visit to a forest on the north-western escarpment of the Black forest, where five years ago there was luxuriant tree growth. There was a living, vital and extremely attractive forest. That area now looks like Passchendale. There are a few skeletons of trees. There is a wilderness where before there was a forest. That is a direct result of acid rain, the pollution which has fallen in both wet and dry forms on that part of the Black forest.

I do not think that any of us will forget either our visit to Galloway's lochs and rivers to see the dramatic increases in acidity which are being experienced, especially at times of the year when the snow melt occurs. These results should be fixed clearly in our minds when we go on to consider how it might be possible for us to start tackling the problems.

I am pleased that the Government have accepted many of the Select Committee's recommendations. I am pleased, too, that they will engage in more monitoring and research work. However, I must say strongly that it is obvious that, on the crucial recommendations of the Select Committee, especially on the reduction of the emission of sulphur dioxide, the Government have failed to take up the seriousness of the problem and the recommendations of the Committee.

The Central Electricity Generating Board is trying to claim, as it tried to claim at different times in its evidence to the Select Committee, that there is much less of a problem than many of us have been arguing. The briefing note which the board circulated to Members only a few days ago in preparation for the debate states in paragraph 7:

"In only a few, fairly small areas of Europe—and Britain is not one of them—has SO_2 been shown to be directly responsible for environmental damage."

That is misleading at best. It ignores the fact that there is overwhelming agreement among scientific opinion, both here and abroad, that SO_2, in terms both direct and indirect, has a damaging effect on fish life in streams, rivers and lakes. The Minister accepted that in his evidence to the Select Committee.

The Government have said that, in tackling the problem, there is something to be said for the fact that Britain has "achieved" — that is the word that the Government use — a major reduction already in the production of sulphur dioxide. It is worth reading carefully paragraph 3.62 of the Government's response to the Select Committee's report. They point to the 40 per cent. reduction in SO_2 production since 1970 and state:

"This reduction has been due to a number of factors such as fuel substitution, energy conservation and"—

here we have a wonderful euphemism—

"industrial restructuring".

They mean that the major reasons for a reduction in SO_2 production over the past 20 years have been a transfer of fuel use to natural gas and, even more important, the industrial recession. To call that an achievement is to deny entirely the basic causes of the reduction in production.

If, as the Government and we hope, the economy shows an upturn in the next five to 10 years and the recession turns around so that we have an industrial base again, what is the potential upturn in sulphur dioxide production that the Government expect if there is not a specific effort to reduce sulphur dioxide emission at source? We must ask also whether the Government have any figures available on the production of sulphur dioxide by power stations over the past 12 months. If the burning of Polish coal, which contains about three times the amount of sulphur that British coal tends to have, and the burning of heavy oil in power stations have both been increased considerably, we must expect that the production of sulphur dioxide by power stations will have increased accordingly over the past 12 months. It would be interesting to know whether the Government have done any work at all to monitor the effects that have occurred in the most recent period.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): The average sulphur content of Polish coal is certainly higher, but the coal exported has a sulphur content much lower than the average, so the most serious problems occur in Poland rather than abroad.

Mr. Smith: That may well be true, but the fact remains that the coal currently being imported from Poland has a considerably higher sulphur content than the average for British coal. Indeed, the areas where British coal has the lowest sulphur content are south Wales and Scotland, which are currently producing very little coal indeed.

The Government state that, having reduced sulphur dioxide emissions considerably in the past 20 to 30 years, the aim is a further reduction of 30 per cent. They state in their response:

"the Government aims to achieve a further reduction of 30 per cent. from 1980 levels of SO_2 emissions by the end of the 1990s."

It is sad that they should refer to the end of the 1990s rather than to the internationally agreed date of 1995. Moreover, the Government have not so far addressed themselves to the point so forcefully made by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi). I hope that the Minister will do so when he winds up. Although the Government claim that they are aiming for a reduction of 30 per cent., nowhere in their response or in the Minister's speech today have they said how they intend to achieve that. No specific measures whatever have been proposed. It is incumbent on the Government to put forward specific proposals and to show how the reduction will be brought about.

The Select Committee went further, rightly commending the 60 per cent. national reduction proposed by the EEC, which would mean a reduction in sulphur dioxide production by power stations of between 80 per cent. and 85 per cent. The Government's dismissal of that proposal

in their response to the Select Committee is sketchy and thin in the extreme. The only argument that seems to have been put forward and the only argument that the Minister gave related to the cost involved. They ignore entirely the experience of countries such as Germany where, when flue gas desulphurisation equipment has been installed in power stations and industrial enterprises, it has been found that the eventual outturn cost of that installation is considerably less than original estimates. That must surely now be taken into account when we consider the costs of installing flue gas desulphurisation equipment in our power stations.

The Government also ignore the fact that the cost would be spread over some 10 to 15 years and that the impact year by year would be far smaller than the figures which the Government have been giving out. The Government should also bear in mind the fact that fuel costs in Britain have risen substantially over the past 10 years.

During his evidence to the Select Committee, I asked the Under-Secretary of State if he would care to compare the figures that he was giving for the installation of flue gas desulphurisation equipment and the cost to the electricity consumer if it were borne directly and entirely by the consumer—that is open to debate—with the rise in electricity prices over the past few years. He said:

> "I have no doubt the question would not have been so pointedly asked unless there had been quite a considerably large figure involved: 50 per cent. over the last few years."

One should consider what the Government have done to fuel prices for the consumer. There was a request from the Secretary of State for Energy in 1979 to the British Gas Corporation to raise domestic prices by 10 per cent. plus inflation for each of the following three years. Recently the Government forced the electricity industry to raise its prices by 2 per cent. There has been a rise of something like 40 per cent. in electricity prices in real terms over the previous decade. The Government imposed a levy on the gas industry of something like £526 million in the financial year 1983-84. Therefore, it ill becomes the Government to say that a rise of 1 per cent. a year in electricity costs to the consumer over the next 10 years is an intolerable burden for the electricity consumer to bear despite the environmental benefits which might well result. The environmental task is surely far more urgent, and the benefits of action are far greater, than the Government have yet given any sign of realising.

Two further small points ought to be made. The first is to ask the Government whether they have a policy, and if so what it is, in relation to new power stations which might be commissioned over the next few years. In particular, what requirement will they place on SO_2 emissions from the oil-fired Kilroot station in Northern Ireland which it is planned will convert to coal later and which is upwind of some of the most sensitive areas in southern Scotland? What are the Government's plans for that, and do they have any specific proposals for ensuring that proper desulphurisation equipment and low nitrogen oxide-producing burning processes are installed in that planned station?

Secondly, there is pressurised fluid bed combustion. All the members of the Select Committee were impressed by the evidence that pressurised fluid bed combustion could provide, if the necessary research was done, a new, attractive and clean technology for the burning of coal in future. But we were all agreed about the importance of speeding up research to produce that technology much sooner than at present expected.

We all know that there are difficulties. In particular, there is the effect on the turbines and the necessity of disposing of waste products. The problems have not yet been entirely solved. However, the attractiveness and potential of the PFB combustion process are such that the Government should assist the National Coal Board and the CEGB in bringing forward the date for the final establishment of a proper working method of PFB.

While it is true that the Government seem to recognise the existence of a problem of some sort, and while they have agreed to carry out more research and more monitoring, their response to the Select Committee's report is deeply disappointing. They have totally failed to acknowledge that action must be taken on the crucial recommendations about the emission of pollutant gases from power stations.

Of course there are complexities, uncertainties and difficulties. There is no 100 per cent. scientific proof of the exact chemical processes at work. However, the members of the Select Committee all agreed that there was overwhelming evidence that the production of SO_2 and nitrogen oxide by power stations causes environmental damage. The Minister himself acknowledged that that is so. He told the Select Committee that sulphur dioxide

> "must cause some damage. It must contribute to some environmental damage, either now or in the future. I think that is right, yes."

If the Minister seriously believes that, we must take steps now rather than later to start to curb the emission of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide by our power stations.

We have heard much talk recently about the so-called greening of the Conservative party. The phrase may well be appropriate with regard to the Conservative Members who joined me and other hon. Members on the Select Committee in producing our report. Regrettably, it is not yet true of the Government.

1.38 pm

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North): I am very conscious of the time. I shall therefore make only one of the points that I had intended to make in a somewhat longer speech. I shall not follow other hon. Members by dealing with the scientific particularities of the matter, which have been fully dealt with.

I believe that in making a decision on this matter we should not concentrate entirely on the economic consequences to ourselves. There are grave political decisions to be made, and grave political damage could be done to our country if we do not recognise the anger—anger is the right word—that has been expressed, especially in Scandinavia and, to some extent, in Germany.

I wish that we could accede to the Committee's suggestion that we should adopt all the EEC suggestions. However, to join the 30 per cent. club would not, in our present situation, cost nearly as much as going all the way with the EEC, and the cost of that step should be weighed against the costs that will inevitably be imposed upon us in terms of political damage if we do not take it.

I remember being at a lunch in a forest when the Swedes sang a song, several verses of which referred unfavourably to the CEGB. I also remember, with special force, talking to an obviously well-informed journalist who said of our

[Mr. Norman Miscampbell]

visit to Scandinavia that we were brave to come. I remember, too, a highly placed official saying that he dealt continuously with troubles in the forest and with people who rang in for advice, and that at times they were almost in tears. There is undoubtedly great political feeling there. We were taken to see a river in Norway where, in 1929, two Englishmen caught 1,000 salmon in six weeks. I cannot think what they did with so many fish, or why they should want to catch them, though I am a fisherman. Not one salmon has been taken out of that river for nearly 20 years.

We are faced with considerable political difficulties and should not think that others will necessarily keep their word. Eastern Europe has made the appropriate noises, but we know that Czechoslovakia continues to burn lignite, which is causing enormous trouble, and of other difficulties. Unless we act, I do not believe that they will.

I welcome the Government's obvious intention to deal with nitrogen oxide emissions, and I hope that we are successful. I urge the Government to consider joining the 30 per cent. club. Although I should like to go much further, I cannot believe that the costs of doing that do not represent a bargain, bearing in mind the political damage that we shall do ourselves in Europe, especially with our friends in Scandinavia, if we do not show that we are willing to co-operate.

1.41 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The attitude of the Government, some of their supporters and the CEGB can be summarised as, "Acid reigns OK." It is not OK. It must be admitted that Britain leads the Western world in the most unenviable capacity as a producer and exporter of acid rain pollutants. We are ahead of the rest of Europe, the United States, Canada and Japan. We are the largest emitter of sulphur pollution in western Europe. The catastrophic effects of that pollution are well documented and incontrovertible. They expose the inadequacy of the Government's policy on the problem. Evidence of damage nationally suggests that the Government have taken into account only the tip of the iceberg when considering the enormous hidden costs to the country of this most obnoxious rainfall.

There is great anxiety in agriculture. Evidence shows reduced yields of cereals, root crops, grass and possibly sheep on acidified pastures. Friends of the Earth estimates that losses to winter wheat and barley might amount to £200 million a year. That represents an entirely unnecessary loss to the farmer, which, in turn, costs the country dear in terms of the cost of food and the loss of farming land.

For the ruinous effects of acid rain on our national architectural heritage we need look no further than the Palace of Westminster and the work that has had to be done here. The cost of treating corroded iron, steel, glass and Portland stone here, at Westminster abbey, St. Paul's cathedral, the Hyde park corner memorial and other buildings throughout London could well run into millions of pounds. Moreover, that cost will recur every decade unless we reduce acid rain pollution. The country is bearing an unjustifiable financial and cultural cost as buildings old and new are damaged, leaving future generations an architecture that is etched in acid.

The danger to our natural environment must also be taken into account. That is even more sinister, because the damage may not be apparent to the general public. The widespread nature of acidified fresh water in the United Kingdom is a disgrace. According to the Welsh water authority, 120 Welsh rivers are affected. In addition, it is estimated that 57 Scottish lochs are either partly or wholly acidified. Unless the Government take steps to reduce those levels, they should make it a statutory obligation on water authorities to erect public notices to warn the population of the possibility of acid baths which may replace natural fresh water ones.

The Nature Conservancy Council lists 100 areas of international importance which are vulnerable to acid rain. Its appeal for legislation to reduce pollution because of the dreadful effects on wildlife has been met by an unsubstantiated attack by the CEGB. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the World Wildlife Fund are among the esteemed authorities which are painstakingly cataloguing the decline of our natural environment.

The Forestry Commission, reluctant until recently to consider the Scandinavian tree death problem, is now conducting a national survey into widespread unexplained damage to trees in the United Kingdom. In the face of the evidence catalogued by many reputable organisations, the Government's present position is feeble.

At present, the aim of the policy is to bring about a 30 per cent. reduction in acid rain pollution by the year 2000. That policy compares unfavourably with that of other Western countries. The nine European Community countries and Canada have formed a 30 per cent. club which commits each member to a 30 per cent. reduction in sulphur emissions by 1995. Even if the United Kingdom joined the club and met its objectives, we would still be the biggest emitter of sulphur pollution in western Europe. The reduction would only retard environmental damage.

The European Commission proposes an EC directive for a 40 per cent. reduction in nitrogen oxide and a 60 per cent. reduction in sulphur by 1995. Britain should support that directive and put it into effect. The EC proposal is of the highest order because it commits all its member states to a mutually beneficial improvement in the quality of environmental life.

How tawdry by comparison are the Government's European preservation policies, which preserve wine lakes and butter mountains rather than the environment. I find little evidence for the Government's opposition to this laudable EC directive to reduce acid rain.

The principal component of the practical strategy consists of modifying combustion at large plants. In the United Kingdom the large plants responsible for 66 per cent. of pollution are CEGB power stations. Although the Government have identified that major source of pollution, they oppose cleaning it up, even though the amount added to an average yearly electricity bill would be about £1. Polls have shown that the general public would willingly pay the extra amount for pollution-free electricity, combined with a vastly improved environment.

Given that, one would expect the CEGB's case to the Government, which opposes improvements, to have substance. Far from it. The CEGB's only consistency has been its unremitting propaganda against improvements. It has waged a campaign of misinformation, first against the Scandinavians in the mid-70s and then, as EC pressure grew, against the Germans, British environmental groups,

the NCC and finally the House of Commons Environment Select Committee. The press, too, has been misinformed, leading it to publish much higher consumer costs than is the case.

The Select Committee criticised the CEGB for presenting misleading and useless cost estimates, seriously inaccurate forecasting and "trite and evasive" evidence on several serious issues. The comment by Sir Walter Marshall, chairman of the CEGB, to the Committee provides a most objectionable quote rather than an explanation of its policy. He said:

"I would much prefer it if politicians did not attempt to make balanced scientific judgments."

It is not for him to tell us our responsibilities when investigating matters of national and international importance.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), replied to the chairman of the CEGB:

"You say that my committee misunderstood CEGB evidence. To the contrary. Your evidence was assessed alongside that of over 100 other witnesses, tested, evaluated and found wanting —not for the first time by a Select Committee."

I should prefer it if the Government did not attempt to make balanced political judgments on acid rain based on the dubious record of the CEGB, and especially the performance of its chairman. The Government have already experienced the undesirable effects of entrusting the future of a nationalised industry to the cult of the personality. Mr. MacGregor at the National Coal Board has wasted £5 billion of taxpayers' money in one year. Britain cannot afford the additional, inestimable cost of environmental damage following the "Marshall" plan.

I ask the Government to adopt the EC directive on the reduction of acid rain as a matter of urgency to combat its catastrophic consequences.

1.51 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): As one with an academic chemistry background, I find this debate and the Select Committee proceedings on the subject fascinating. I feel strongly on the subject, but where one feels strongly it is all the more important that one tempers such strength of feeling with due regard to the scientific facts and to the economic costs of possible options. Notwithstanding that, it is evident from the evidence taken by the Select Committee in Britain, Germany and Scandinavia that there is a serious problem. I welcomed the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, which was thoughtful. He is a genuine seeker after the truth. His visit to Scandinavia did much to convince him of the importance that the Scandinavians place on the problem and of the large scale of their difficulties.

The place of fishing, hunting and shooting in the Scandinavian psyche and the position of trees and forests in the German psyche are similar to the British view of land, which has always been a great feature of British aspirations. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Scandinavians should react so strongly when in one area of Norway alone more than 10,000 lakes are fishless.

There is some agreement about the evidence for the depredations that have occurred and about the volume of pollution that is being emitted from Britain and other countries. It is all very well for the Soviet Union cynically to attach itself to the 30 per cent. club. Britain has a proud tradition of fulfilling its promises, whereas the Soviet Union frequently joins international commitments to impress people without the slightest intention of carrying them out. The evidence of serious pollution not only in eastern Europe but in the countries immediately adjacent to it shows that it is a cynical attitude compared with the genuine concern of many western European countries. A realistic appraisal of the fact that if we commit ourselves to the 30 per cent. club we have to achieve that has led my hon. Friend the Minister and his advisers to take a rather more cautious approach than we would like.

I impress upon my hon. Friend two points. First, pollution is wrong in principle. There is no question but that these are toxic substances, and that means that we have a moral obligation to take every opportunity to reduce the level of pollution that we are giving out. Secondly, there is a real worry in Scandinavia about what effect this will have on British-Scandinavian relations, which have traditionally been extremely good.

We have an opportunity to put into practice the traditional British approach of best practicable means by taking full advantage of the technology that is presently available to us. The cost of complying with joining the 30 per cent. club is a reasonable cost, given the balance of probability that arises from the scientific evidence that we received and evaluated. From the scientific evidence, there was no question but that there was a relationship between our emissions and Scandinavian problems. We may not understand each and every link in the chain that joins those two, but we must accept that if we reduced our pollution it would bring some benefits to Scandinavia and to ourselves. Under those circumstances, it is right to make a commitment to the 30 per cent. club. After all, we are nearly two thirds of the way there.

It was unfair of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) to say that the Government have entirely rejected the main point of the Select Committee's report, because one has to examine not just the letters that are printed in the report but the thought behind them. If we were to achieve part of the 30 per cent. reduction, that would take us into compliance with the membership of the so-called 30 per cent. club and would achieve a good proportion of the Committee's main objective, which is to secure a large-scale reduction in pollution.

There is a long way to go, but there is a great deal that we can achieve. I commend to my hon. Friend the Minister the fact that the consequences of our go-slow on the 30 per cent. club are a serious deterioration in our relations with Scandinavia and are undermining our justly-earned reputation as one of the leading European countries in pollution control.

1.57 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on his chairmanship of the Select Committee and for so ably opening the debate.

This is not simply a matter for the Department of the Environment. There are also implications, which have not been raised, for the agriculture and food industries, certainly through better education and information. There are employment aspects and energy implications. I have been pleased to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environmnent here for most of the debate. The Foreign Office is also involved because of the interaction with other states. The Health and Social Security Department is involved because of the damage that sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and other emissions

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are having on the health of our nation. I could carry on in a similar vein. Therefore, I am delighted to see that the representative of one of our most important regional offices is winding up, and it would have been nice to have seen a representative from the Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices. Environmental considerations need to be an integral part of our policy network if they are to make any headway. We have a moral as well as an economic duty to safeguard our society.

Has the scale of the problem been truly appreciated? The debate has been relegated to the first parliamentary Friday after Christmas, so it would appear not. Only the USSR, in the whole of Europe, produces more sulphur dioxide than Britain. Man-made ozone, created from the combustion of fossil fuel, has had the most damaging effect. An example from my own constituency is the historic York minster, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) referred today.

The information that I received was from the surveyor of the fabric at York minster. There were two specific examples. Five or six years ago, Norman stone exposed to medieval air for 200 years on the north side underneath the vergers' vestry was revealed. Although it had been covered at about 1380, during all that time there had only been a darkening of dirt. There was no erosion or decay of the stone. Now, with magnesian limestone—which is certainly more delicate—there are great problems. The second example is stone put in only seven years ago, which has already lost one eighth of an inch of its surface. That is a staggering example of what is happening to a major historical and religious building. Acid rain is a contributory factor. I do not doubt that we have cleaner cities since the Clean Air Act 1956, but that deterioration has occurred during such a short time. I hope that the Minister will appreciate that we do not want to get into the United States bumper bar expression "acid rain causes nuclear power", but it is a strong message.

I know that a number of my colleagues have referred to the difficulties of the CEGB, and I am sure that we have underestimated the arguments about nitrogen. But if we are to deal with true diplomacy and in the interests of trade, there must be stronger action. I am one of those who would like Britain to join the so-called 30 per cent. club, and feel that we should go further, because polite nagging is not enough. The Minister should not shelter under an umbrella of limited technical energy research to protect him from an anticipated acid drizzle of disapproval from his fellow environment Ministers in Europe. We owe it not only to this generation but to our children and grandchildren to improve the environment, which has been so damaged by man, and, in consequence the quality of life.

2.2 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Tribute has already been paid to the work of the Select Committee. I wish to pay tribute to the interest shown by the members of the Committee in today's debate — not only in speaking about the report but in standing by its recommendations. The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), pointedly asked the question what is the precise Government programme. He did not receive a reply from the Minister. Perhaps he could not answer or perhaps he did not want to answer. The fact remains that the Chairman was understandably disappointed that the Government did not accept the two main recommendations in the report, although they accepted the other 17. It was almost as though the twin pillars upon which many of the recommendations rested had been pulled down by the blind Samson at the Department of the Environment. Time and again hon. Members argued in favour of joining the 30 per cent. club and of commitment to the European directive.

In many ways, this has been a House of Commons occasion. One of the duties that Select Committees perform is to make the House more aware of the issues, the complexities and the technicalities at stake. Having served on a Select Committee, I know that in many ways they fulfill that important obligation.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) emphasised a point contained in the text of the report, that the Committee had started its inquiry "with open minds". However, the Committee is now convinced about the matter and looking for more positive Government action and acceptance of the urgency of what is at stake. Several hon. Members have said that costs are involved, but there is a price to be paid for doing nothing. Many hon. Members also referred to the Clean Air Act 1956. Of course, nobody would say now that that was not worth the cost. We probably take it too much for granted. People have forgotten or did not experience the fogs and smogs that used to plague urban areas. Therefore, there is a sense of acceptance with regard to that aspect of clean air legislation.

Several hon. Members also referred to the on-costs that will arise elsewhere if we do not act on the problem of acid rain. In a notable passage in his speech, the Minister talked about the cost-benefit approach. I wondered, cynically, whether it was benefit to us and cost to somebody else. That is the difficulty that we are dealing with. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) spoke about a Marshall plan. For a moment one thought of the post-war Marshall plan, which was positive and designed to give out resources. It was not of course the same as the Marshall plan associated with the CEGB, which is to hold back and restrain, but there will be costs elsewhere. We have a compartmentalised approach in the way in which we do our accounting in Government circles. What may seem to be a cost at the Department of Energy may not be a cost in another Department. The Government should take a view on the basis of totality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton), who was, as ever, on the ball, mentioned the Scottish interest and the apparent absence of input by the Scottish Office, although I know that many eminent Scots gave evidence to the Select Committee in other capacaties. The Scottish Development Department published its paper on acid rain in June last year, which acknowledged the potential damage to the lochs in Galloway. The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) referred today to the problems of Loch Ard in his area. The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) drew attention to the areas at risk in many parts of the western Highlands. Last year the Nature Conservancy Council report on acid deposition and its implications for nature conservancy in Britain contained some disturbing warning signs in its text.

The hon. Member for Stirling also alluded to the aggravation of some problems by the Forestry

Commission's policies over the years, and the species of tree that it has planted. That is a fairly complicated matter because age, structure and other factors undoubtedly come into play. However, I wonder whether, if more of the woodlands of Scotland were in the private sector, there would be a greater sense of urgency on the part of the Government with regard to the damage that is being done. The Government have a slipshod attitude on matters of public asset as against private interest.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does my hon. Friend accept that the planting policies of private forestry operations have over the past 10 or 20 years tended to be even worse than those of the Forestry Commission in terms of the type of tree planted? Does that not augur badly for the sale of Forestry Commission land upon which the Government are now embarked?

Mr. Craigen: That is a tree up which I shall not climb. My hon. Friend, however, makes an interesting point. One of the difficulties facing many lay people who are not caught up in either the ecological or energy lobby is that they see no direct result from the problems of acid rain. It is only when they come up against the specifics that they start taking an interest.

In our basically urban society—that is what we have in the United Kingdom—less attention is paid to the problems of the environment than in some European countries where, although they may be urbanised, there tends to be a greater interplay between urban and rural areas than is often the case in part of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet referred to the problems of buildings. Several hon. Members have mentioned the forests under attack. We have also heard about the risks to agricultural land and the threat to our fresh water. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), a recognised authority on matters of the natural environment, mentioned the threat to much of our wildlife. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green made the point that it is sensible to try to stop the emission of acid at source. I agree that preventing rather than paying for the consequence is the most sensible approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) made a useful point when he asked what was the Government's policy about the commissioning of new power stations, because that would at least give us a clue as to the importance that they attach to the problem.

Several hon. Members, not least my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), have rightly emphasised the importance of using as much as possible coal with little sulpur content. They specifically referred to coalfields in Scotland, the north-east and south Wales where we might say that the coal is worth its weight in coal if it has a limited sulphur content. I hope that more attention will be paid to the use of clean coal, if it can be described as such.

The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) and others rightly emphasised the employment potential in environmental conservation and protection. We are inclined to overlook the job creation spin-off that can arise from preventive measures.

I wish to repeat two points made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. We feel that the United Kingdom should join the 30 per cent. club and show much greater earnestness of its intent to our neighbours. That point was ably put by the hon. and learned Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Miscampbell) when referring to the importance of external relations.

Secondly, we must indicate our strong and clear commitment to the European directive. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) rightly emphasised that we are dealing with an issue which straddles national boundaries and which requires the greatest possible collaboration and co-operation in the European context.

We have today paid tribute to the Select Committee. Our tribulations arise from the Government's response to the report of what was an all-party Select Committee which emphasised the urgency of the problem and the need for quick action. There is a temptation for any generation to bestow on future generations the consequences of its short-sightedness. That is especially true in politics where, let us be frank, we tend to operate at least on a quinquennial basis. While the green fingers may not yet have touched the ballot boxes, environmental factors must have a higher place in the politics of Britain.

No Government this century have gained so greatly and benefited so quickly from the natural resource of offshore oil than the present Government. Moreover, the benefits were put in their lap by the efforts of the former Labour Government because of the way in which that Administration approached oil participation and public enterprise arrangements. I hope that the Government will not prove as careless in their handling of environmental issues as they have shown themselves callous in dealing with all matters domestic.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen) ended by saying that we should not be short-sighted. I suspect that he suffers more from a short memory, judging by his remarks about the development of North sea oil under the last Labour Government. He seems to forget the record of that Administration in environmental terms and particularly the fact that between 1974 and 1979 they had the chance to implement the Control of Pollution Act 1974 but failed to do so, purely on the grounds of cost. On the basis of that example, we are entitled to take with a pinch of salt the remarks that have been made today from the Opposition Front Bench.

This has been a useful debate, introduced comprehensively by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) on what is probably one of the most complex environmental problems facing us today. Hon. Members have shown interest in and knowledge of the subject and have expressed what I appreciate is a widely held concern about the environmental effects of acid rain. This mirrors the concern which the Select Committee expressed in its report.

The debate has demonstrated the complexity of the issues and the potentially enormous costs which could arise from some of the solutions proposed. There is a great deal at stake and we must be sure that we fully understand the essentials of the problem, and particularly the cause and effect relationships, before we commit ourselves to considerable sums of public expenditure; time permitting, I shall return to that subject. I shall deal with as many

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

points as possible in the time available to me, but if I fail to reply to any questions I shall endeavour to answer them by way of correspondence.

I will try to put the whole issue in perspective. A number of hon. Members have criticised the Government for what they describe as inactivity. They criticise us for depending on research instead of taking up some of the measures which they feel we should be undertaking. Had this criticism been made against a background of increasing emission levels of SO_2 there might have been inactivity worthy of the criticism which has been levelled at the Government. However, that is not the background against which we are debating this issue. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said, we have seen a reduction of about 40 per cent. in the SO_2 level since 1970, and a 20 per cent. reduction since 1980. The emission levels are reducing. It has been said that they have reduced for many reasons outwith the Government's control but that does not diminish the importance of the fact that the levels are reducing. We must continue to encourage their reduction.

The speech of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was dealt with by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. I regret the language which the hon. Gentleman used when addressing himself to a sensitive and complex issue. He described the present position—I think that I quote him correctly — as like waging chemical warfare against Britain and north Europe. He will realise that those are emotive words which conjure up fears and frightening pictures for many, especially in terms of health.

I have always believed the hon. Member for South Shields to be a responsible politician who would not wish unnecessarily to create fears in people's minds. He knows that there is no evidence in the United Kingdom that acid deposition directly affects health at ambient air pollution levels and that any current health factors associated with air pollution are most likely related to past exposure, especially to smoke from the use of coal in pre-Clean Air Act days. I believe that the hon. Gentleman used the language of exaggeration. I hope that on mature reflection he will realise that he should not have used it. I hope, too, that at some future time, if not now, he will withdraw it.

Dr. David Clark: I shall not withdraw. We are talking about chemicals in the atmosphere, and there is considerable evidence of health risks in Scandinavia as a result of Britain's acidic emissions.

Mr. Ancram: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has a picture of chemical warfare that is different from that of my hon. and right hon. Friends. I hope that when he reflects upon his remarks——

Sir Hugh Rossi: On the risks to health in Scandinavia, the Select Committee adduced evidence of diarrhoea in babies as a result of leaching through copper pipes in the water supply. That does not happen in Britain.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that clear on the basis of evidence received by the Select Committee. I hope that the hon. Member for South Shields will reflect on his remarks in a calmer moment.

The hon. Members for Maryhill and for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) said that the Scottish Office did not submit evidence to the Select Committee. If they read page VIII of the first volume of the report, they will find a list of written evidence received on the acid rain inquiry that was not printed. The Scottish Office is referred to about a third of the way down the page. That evidence was based on the position paper to which the hon. Member for Maryhill referred.

As Minister with responsibilities for the environment in Scotland, I have given considerable and serious attention to acid rain. It has aroused considerable public concern and debate in Scotland. There was evidence of this in the three-day conference that was organised in September by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. It is because of that concern that I have been anxious to ensure that there should be a widespread and fully informed public debate. To assist in this, the position paper was published in the summer of 1984. That document sets out the Scottish dimension.

I can summarise the position in Scotland by saying that, because of its geology and soil, Scotland includes many of the areas that are most vulnerable to acid deposition. Consequently, an extensive research effort is being undertaken in Scotland to determine the chemical reactions taking place in the atmosphere within plant canopies and within soils and water systems to assess the impact that acid rain is having on those environments.

The evidence so far is of some past acidification of surface waters, but I am glad to say that as yet the environmental effects are limited to a reasonably few lochs and streams in the geologically most vulnerable areas, mainly in the south-west of Scotland, where over a period of years there has been some reduction in fish populations.

I was most interested this summer to see for myself something of the research work that is being undertaken at Loch Dee in Dumfriesshire by the Solway river purification board in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and the freshwater fisheries laboratory of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. Several hon. Members asked about the impact of afforestation on acidity. At least one of the experiments that is taking place at Loch Dee is related to that and the findings of those experiments will obviously be of great value in terms of the way that afforestation should take place in future.

The Government are keen to see research on the subject progressing. We shall continue to support it financially. As was made clear at the beginning of the debate, a considerable amount of research work is already being undertaken in the United Kingdom. In 1984-85 Government-sponsored work alone will cost £5 million, of which 10 per cent. will be spent on projects in Scotland. That is a substantial effort and, for those who said that it should be increased, it shows an increase of about 30 per cent. over last year.

My Department has also published a register of research projects on acid rain being undertaken in Scotland, whether at the behest of Government Departments or sponsored by other bodies such as universities, electricity boards, and so on. Copies of that register have been placed in the Library. It is interesting and impressive that 49 separate projects are under way in Scotland, representing an investment of some £3 million up to about 1987. Of that, some £2 million involves direct Government funding.

The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) asked about the damage to forests and where it had occurred. Visible damage to forests has been observed in old plantations on the western seaboard of Scotland, but

that damage is not extensive. It is largely random and the symptoms differ in some significant respects from those observed in Germany.

The Forestry Commission's initial view is that the damage is climatic in origin and relates to the temperatures which were experienced in 1983-84. However, the possiblity of pollution damage cannot be ruled out. Therefore, the commission is undertaking research to establish the causes, but it will be some time before the results of that research are available.

Several hon. Members asked what would be the cost of implementing the EC directive or of joining the 30 per cent. club. A number of figures were put forward which in general it was agreed came roughly to an increase of 5 per cent. in electricity prices over 10 years. I do not think that hon. Members realise that that figure covered SO_2 measures alone and that in addition several million pounds would be required for power stations to install nitrogen oxide controls.

Mr. Alton: Who pays to put right the damage being done to buildings up and down the country, and what will the Government contribute to those costs?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman must realise that it is one thing to define an environmental problem when the sources of pollution are identifiable and quite another to seek to define it when other principles apply.

I am conscious that time is running out, but several serious points were discussed, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), and I shall try to answer them in correspondence as soon as possible.

The basic question throughout the debate has been how the Government intend to achieve the reduction by the end of the century. We believe that we can build on what is already a substantial reduction in SO_2 emissions and that we can achieve the further 30 per cent. by the end of the century. We also believe that we can achieve a similar reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions.

We believe that we shall achieve that aim not by the adoption of a rigid emission target, which is ultimately just a set of words, but by a progressive and flexible approach using new developments and new control techniques, from the lean burn engine and fluidised bed combustion which have already been mentioned to further conservation measures with both intrinsic and economic merit as well as the changing pattern of energy generation and fuel use. It has become clear from the debate that our aims and purposes are, in a sense, common to us all——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Magistrates' Court, Basildon

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before presenting the case for a magistrates' courthouse in Basildon, I should make it clear that the need for this results not from any crisis or breakdown of law and order in my constituency but from a crisis in the physical administration of justice. I am fortunate and privileged to represent an area in which the overwhelming majority of my constituents are decent, hard-working, law-abiding citizens. The reputation that some people gave to Basildon in its infancy as a new town of being a rough area, rife with vandals and thugs, is entirely unjustified. The town has matured and developed into a happy, well-balanced community full of the old east end spirit of warmth and generosity, and I greatly enjoy living there.

From time to time, however, some of my constituents fall foul of the law and end up in Billericay magistrates' court because there is no court in Basildon. The largest new town in the country does not have its own magistrates' court, and it is no exaggeration to say that crisis point has been reached at Billericay magistrates' court, where many have described conditions as inhumane and unjust and likely to lead to miscarriages of justice. I have taken soundings from many people interested in these matters and all agree about the unsuitability of the present courthouse.

The population of Basildon is about 100,000 and is increasing yearly by between 2,000 and 3,000, with a projected total on completion of the new town of about 120,000. With the increase in population, there has been an increase in crime. The number of arrests has doubled since 1974 and is now nearly 4,600 per year. Nine male and three female cells are available, so that double banking is often necessary. Billericay police station has three male and two female cells. In 1984 it had to handle 1,130 prisoners. Those cells are also used by prisoners from Basildon because there are no court cells, so it is common for as many as six prisoners to wait in one cell.

Billericay courthouse consists of two court rooms, two retiring rooms, one interview room doubling as a duty solicitors room, and one witness room. There are no rooms for advocates, police, press or ushers. There is no first-aid, waiting public or matrons' room, and there are no refreshment facilities. There is also no custody accommodation for juveniles, and the statutory requirements for a juvenile court are not met at all. Cells, toilets and gaolers' rooms are shared with Billericay police station.

There is minimal room for lawyer-client consultation. That cannot assist the administration of justice. The toilet facilities sometimes lack the capability to provide privacy for large numbers of prisoners, and there are no exercise facilities whatever. That cannot do much for the preservation of human dignity among prisoners, some of whom are subsequently found innocent. The most worrying aspects are that it is sometimes impossible to separate juvenile offenders from adults, that distressed victims often have to sit opposite their attackers and that separated parents may have to sit opposite each other even in cases involving child battering. There is nowhere in the building to conduct private interviews before or after a

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case has been heard. There is no facility for private counselling by social workers. The lack of those facilities could mean the wrong kind of assistance, or the wrong sentence.

I am not just worried about the conditions. The effectiveness of the battle for law and order is being reduced because the court is six miles from Basildon. The sheer drain on manpower is harming the effectiveness of the local police, who do a marvellous job despite the appalling difficulties.

One prisoner must be accompanied by one escort, three by two escorts and five by three escorts and a sergeant. After the weekend, it is a common occurrence for the police to have to escort six prisoners to Billericay. Large numbers of Basildon police spend time outside the court room waiting for cases to be reached and decided, and at the same time a number of vehicles are kept waiting outside the court. Only five prisoners may be carried in one vehicle, so after the weekend at least two may be needed.

Last year, just under 800 prisoners required immediate transport from Basildon to Billericay and 5,449 offenders were reported for process and later summoned to the court. Vast amounts of the time and resources of the police are therefore being spent elsewhere than on their prime function, which is the prevention and detection of crime. There are also the officers who are needed to give evidence —perhaps on a number of occasions. Beside the cost in manpower and indeed in cash terms, year after year, the capital cost of providing a courthouse in Basildon pales into significance.

There is little point in the Government's increasing the numbers of police, encouraging a return to the beat and ensuring that the total package of remuneration is good enough to attract high quality recruits if policemen are to spend much of their time sitting in court rooms miles from their sphere of operation.

It had always been intended that, as Basildon took its place as the centre of population for the area, a courthouse would be provided. In 1966 Essex county council acquired land next to the police station. There is already a tunnel leading from the cells to the proposed site. A purpose-built courthouse would provide suitable accommodation for the efficient administration of justice in the petty sessional division for years to come.

The major advantage of the provision of a magistrates' court in Basildon would be the elimination of the quantities of police and vehicle time spent on security and escort duties. Security would be immeasurably increased by the use of the tunnel. Policemen who might otherwise wait for hours for a case to be called would be available for office duties, and so more policemen would be available to patrol the streets and to care for the population.

An experiment has recently been conducted locally. The police have set up a sub-station in one of the busiest areas of Basildon. To date it has helped them to arrest at least one person who might otherwise have got away, and it has accelerated dramatically the arrest of others. The localising of the executive arm of the law has indeed increased efficiency. The localising of the judicial function must surely have the same effect.

There are differences of opinion about what other activities might be catered for in the new courthouses. There is what has been termed the joint venture project. I believe that it is crucial that the courthouse should be the right size. Authoritative sources believe that we need four court rooms. There must be proper facilities inside, and a reasonable exercise yard for prisoners. Time after time communities build some new facility and then find that the building is too small. Let us not make the same mistake here, but consider reasonable projections.

Essex county council is a well-run authority which does its best to provide cost-efficient services. Ironically, it is in some financial difficulties. It believes that it has been penalised unfairly through following tight Government financial guidelines. We badly need a new library in Basildon, and I want the best possible facility for it. For financial reasons, the council is considering combining the library with the courthouse building. I do not like that idea, for many reasons, so I appeal to the Government to help us in our financial difficulty and to prevail on an appropriate local body to see whether it might help us.

It makes sense to combine the courthouse with the probation service and with social services if there must be a joint venture. Such activities are conducted in difficult circumstances in Essex House, which does not even have facilities for disabled people. The lease on Essex House expires in 1994.

I spoke earlier of a crisis in the administration of justice. Our legal system adheres to the view that a person is innocent until proven guilty. I pay tribute to all of those who are involved in that process and who are battling on in difficult conditions. I should like to mention the magistrates especially. The case for a new courthouse is overwhelming. At the moment, the statutory requirements for holding juvenile courts cannot be met. Additional courts are held at Brentwood—there are six a week. For many years there has been talk of a courthouse in Basildon. I want the talking to stop and for there to be some action.

In June 1983 my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that our main task was to ensure that the extra resources were used efficiently and effectively. I should like the start date to be brought forward one year, because the most efficient and effective way in which to use the resources in Basildon is to build a magistrates' court now.

2.41 pm

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) for allowing me a few minutes of his Adjournment debate, especially as this is the first time that I have spoken in one. As the former hon. Member for Basildon, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his splendid election victory of 1983.

The magistrates in our petty sessional division have sat at Billericay for more than 100 years, and in the present building since 1938. I join my hon. Friend in praising the chairman of the bench, Mr. Watt, the 46 magistrates and the officials who serve with such distinction. They have a high reputation for quality, judgment and fairness.

I am delighted that the Government have proposed the building of a new courthouse in Basildon. It is long overdue. We have the use of an overflow court in Brentwood, which is not satisfactory, although we are grateful to Brentwood magistrates for giving us the use of one of their courts from time to time.

I assume that the magistrates' bench will be transferred to Basildon. What is the proposed use for the present court buildings in Billericay? Will they be used as overflow courts, even when Basildon is operative? The name of the petty sessional division is the Billericay petty sessional division. I understand that Parliament must approve any change of name. Might I suggest, for historic reasons that I have already given, that the name remains unchanged?

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon commented on the position of the county council, the court building and the library. This matter goes back to the time when I represented Basildon. The Great Oaks site in Basildon was owned by the county council and a joint scheme for three courts and a 14,000 sq ft library was thought appropriate. Will the Minister tell us whether a fourth court will be necessary and whether it will be built? What accommodation will be available for other services, such as those of lawyers and probation officers? I understand that the county council is prepared to consider alternative sites for the library so long as the site involves no extra cost to Essex ratepayers. So far, sites such as the civic centre and the Church walk house block have been suggested.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has eloquently described the many and various shortcomings of the existing magistrates' courts in Billericay. Although I have not had the pleasure of visiting the premises, I would not want to dispute his account. Indeed, our files are well filled on the subject. We were not surprised or displeased to receive in 1982 proposals by Essex county council to replace the courthouse of Billericay with one in Basildon. We were sent full details of the scope and range of the existing facilities, and we acknowledge them to be lacking by modern standards.

The picture presented showed that the case for a new courthouse satisfied three of our four basic criteria of operational need: shortage of court rooms, shortage of staff accommodation and inadequate ancillary facilities. We were able to agree that that added up to a priority operational need and, therefore, that forward planning might be put in hand for the scheme.

At that stage we could not give a commitment to a specific start date because, against the background of continuing severe restraint on capital expenditure in the public sector, the rolling programme of major magistrates' courts building schemes was already substantially committed. The case made about the Billericay court is being made by many other courthouses. There is stiff competition for a place in the programme.

Hard decisions still have to be made about relative priorities for slotting in new starts. We explained at the beginning that inclusion of the scheme on the priority planning list meant that the Basildon courthouse was now one of the group of high priority schemes which would have first call on such margins as became available for new starts in the years ahead.

That was two years ago. I am glad that since then further progress has been made. We have found a place for the scheme in the latest package of projected new starts in 1987-88, on which offers went out to the providing authorities last month. Since his election my hon. Friend has played a leading role in ensuring that we have not been left in any doubt about the deficiencies of the present position. I hope that he will not let the best be the enemy of the good. Compared with the timings of many projects, the Basildon project has been processed with considerable speed. Since the hon. Gentleman has achieved so much, I hope that he will not sell his achievement short by thinking that he has been handed a dusty deal. He has been handed rather a good deal. I should like to know that he acknowledges that fact.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) to the debate and know that he is interested in it. I am glad that the move from Billericay to Basildon will not provoke local enmities, in the middle of which we sometimes find ourselves, in relation to magistrates' courts benches. In answer to his questions, the local authority is in the driving seat. The national taxpayer may pick up 80 per cent. of the bill, but the local authority and local interests are in the driving seat for producing the plan. The Government do not seek to dictate on such matters. We consider carefully the points put to us and, provided that they fit our view of the way in which the court system should operate, local interests usually discover us to be obliging on matters such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend. Therefore, I must ask him to make his points first to the local interests, and we shall see where we go from there.

It is for Essex county council, as the providing authority, to decide whether it can accept the offered commitment and its expenditure implications. Although the capital cost will qualify for the usual 80 per cent. grant from central funds, the basic funding responsibility and that for the residue rests with the local authority. In that connection, my hon. Friend expressed some disappointment that the start date is 1987-88. I would say only what I have already told him: on the present pattern of committed expenditure on the magistrates' courts rolling programme, 1987-88 is the earliest date at which margins will be available for any new major start on courthouse schemes under the centrally controlled capital allocation within which all magistrates' courts in England and Wales must be accommodated.

Indeed, in the present financial climate, with local authority budgeting so fine-tuned, as my hon. Friends will be aware, it would not be reasonable to expect the local authority to accommodate the funding of a substantial new capital commitment in its forward budget, at much shorter notice than the start date that we have given. However, once a starts offer is accepted and the commitment agreed as firm, the Government would always be ready to consider adjustments on timing, forward or back, to take account of changed circumstances.

It has been suggested, as my hon. Friend said, that there might be security problems if the new courthouse complex were to incorporate the local public library. The practicalities of locating other services on the same site or in the same building as the courthouse are a matter for the local authority, because the site belongs to it and public libraries are its responsibility. If public library facilities were provided in the same building as the magistrates' court, there would be security considerations in relation to some aspects of the courthouse function—the custody area is an obvious example—and there would have to be separate access arrangements. However, I differ a little from my hon. Friend in saying that these are matters which

[Mr. David Mellor]

we would expect the local authority to sort out with the police. We would consider those aspects when firm design proposals were put to us following those discussions.

Subject to what we may discover when the detailed plans are introduced, I can see no grounds of principle for excluding other services or the public from the site or from other parts of the building; nor is there any reason why the practicalities of ensuring the necessary separation of facilities should present insuperable problems. We must await the plans before we make a decision. My hon. Friend will make his points to the local authority and the police to ensure that his views are taken into account as the necessary local evaluation process continues.

My hon. Friend asked me to say which specific facilities would be provided in the new Basildon courthouse, including the number of court rooms, and whether there would be facilities for the probation service. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay also mentioned that. These are matters for the providing authority, Essex county council, to decide, but it will wish to take into account the views of the magistrates' courts committee. The scheme can then be put to the Government, who will express a final view on its scope and range. The original outline proposals envisaged a need for three court rooms plus the usual ancillary facilities, and on that basis we accepted the scheme. However, no detailed design proposals have been put to us. I acknowledge that provision for future expansion might make it sensible to build four courts rather than three, and I should make it clear that, if the local authority decided to do so, the Government would have no objection. These matters lie in their court—no pun intended.

As for the probation element, as far as we are aware, this was not originally envisaged. However, there is no reason in principle why a probation suite should not be provided as part of the complex if it is needed. Again, this is a matter for the probation committee to sort out with the Essex county council, and then to put such arrangements as they propose to us.

I hope that by the end of the decade we shall have a new court building in Basildon that will be an ornament to the administration of justice in Essex. If so, a number of people can take credit for that, and my two hon. Friends will be prominent among them. I am glad to be able to say as much this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 December 1984

THE ARTS

Arts Council (Grant)

Mr. Freud asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts whether he will list in the *Official Report* the per capita Arts Council grant given to each regional arts association for each of the last five years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information is as follows:

	Per Capita Expenditure (Pence)				
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85 (Allocation)*
Eastern Arts	10·0	11·3	14·4	15·2	14·9
East-Midland Arts	17·6	21·2	25·0	28·1	26·9
Greater London Arts	13·9	18·1	21·8	22·2	22·9
Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts	27·9	32·9	37·4	39·8	38·0
Merseyside Arts	21·4	24·7	27·6	29·7	29·8
Northern Arts	42·1	46·9	55·9	58·7	58·4
North-West Arts	14·1	15·9	18·4	19·8	19·7
Southern Arts	14·7	16·9	20·2	21·0	20·9
South-East Arts	11·8	13·9	17·4	18·8	18·7
South-West Arts	18·2	20·0	25·0	25·2	25·0
West-Midlands Arts	15·7	17·6	20·3	21·6	21·0
Yorkshire Arts	13·0	14·7	17·9	18·4	17·7

Museum Purchase Grant Scheme

Mr. Murphy asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts what future arrangemens are envisaged for the local museum purchase grant scheme at present administered by the Victoria and Albert museum and the Science museum.

Mr. Waldegrave: In the light of the consultations last year, and of subsequent discussions with the two museums and the Museums and Galleries Commission, my right hon. and noble Friend has decided to confirm the proposal to transfer responsibility for the local museum purchase grant schemes to the commission with effect from April 1985. The Victoria and Albert and Science museums will, for the time being, continue to administer the schemes on behalf of the commission, within guidelines agreed between them and the commission. The operating arrangements will be subject to review in the light of experience.

This solution takes account of the views expressed during the consultations that the transfer would be in keeping with the developing role of the commission and with the newly-acquired trustee status of the two museums which makes it less appropriate that they should continue to be the sole agents for the disbursement of these centrally-provided funds. It also responds to the widely-voiced concern that any changes should be such as not to inhibit the speed and flexibility of handling grant applications, or to forgo the valuable expertise and continuity provided by the museums.

My right hon. and noble Friend pays tribute to the skill with which the museums and their staff have operated the schemes over the years, and which he is confident will be preserved under the new arrangements.

Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Supply Estimates for 1985-86 will provide for the transfer of vote accountability for the grant funds, which will remain at the levels planned in 1984-85 despite the reductions my right hon. and noble Friend is making in purchasing grants elsewhere.

Arts and Libraries (Expenditure)

Mr. Murphy asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he is in a position to announce the allocation of the arts and libraries expenditure programme for 1985-86.

Mr. Waldegrave: The central Government element of the arts and libraries programme has been set at £272 million for 1985-86, an increase of 5·8 per cent. in cash over the corresponding provision for 1984-85. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimates, my right hon. and noble Friend proposes the main 1985-86 allocations listed below. For most areas of recurrent funding, this will be a tight settlement. While it will allow present levels of activity to be broadly maintained, the need to provide room for some modest new developments as made it necessary to restrict the underlying baseline increase to 3 per cent. in cash above 1984-85 levels.

The Arts Council's grant will be £105 million, representing a total increase of 5 per cent. over 1984-85. This, however, includes £2 million extra money towards implementation of its regional development strategy, some additional help for the Scottish national companies, advance preparations for taking over the South Bank, and other special needs.

The total provision for the British Film Institute will represent a 4¾ per cent. increase, for the Crafts Council a

5·8 per cent. increase, and for the National Film and Television school a 13 per cent. increase, including in each case additional sums for special needs. Following the successful launch of the business sponsorship incentive scheme for which £½ million has been set aside this year, my right hon. and noble Friend is providing £1 million for its continuation in 1985-86. My right hon. and noble Friend is contributing another £¼ million towards the Royal Academy's building and endowment appeal fund, with the aim also of stimulating further private donations.

For the museums and galleries, the 1985-86 settlement continues the shift in emphasis towards the better conservation and maintenance of existing collections and buildings, as compared with new acquisition and construction.

The total net provision for national museums' and galleries' general running costs will be increased by 4·6 per cent. after allowing for higher estimated receipts and for revoted surplus income from previous years. The Government's review of the net vote/revote system is still in progress and the existing arrangements will therefore have to continue during 1985-86. However, my right hon. and noble Friend aims to introduce improvements in 1986-87 designed to give museums a greater incentive to maximise income for their own benefit.

This provision for the national musuems and galleries includes the continuation of the 1984-85 £½ million allocated for conservation projects, together with a further £1 million for other special needs. The £½ million fund for conservation projects in local museums through the Museums and Galleries Commission will be repeated in 1985-86. The provision borne on the Property Services Agency's vote for the national museums' and galleries' capital building and maintenance programme, which was substantially increased this year, will be further increased by some 15 per cent. in 1985-86, with priority being given to the maintenance and refurbishment of existing buildings. This continued shift of emphasis is being achieved partly by reducing the basic national purchase grants by about 13 per cent. on average, though with no reductions for the smaller institutions.

My right hon. and noble Friend is making a separate announcement about future arrangements for the local museum purchase grant schemes currently administered by the Victoria and Albert Museum and Science Museum. £1½ million is allocated in 1985-86 for the National Heritage memorial fund, and £1 million for acceptances of art objects in lieu of tax, from the arts and libraries programme; matching provision will be made on the Department of the Environment vote. My right hon. and noble Friend is making a separate announcement on the Government's policy towards heritage provision.

Next, subject to Parliamentary approval, my right hon. and noble Friend proposes to increase the statutory ceiling on the public lending right scheme by nearly 40 per cent. to £2¾ million. This will help authors and go some way towards restoring the real value of the ceiling since it was originally fixed. Recurrent provision for the British Library and grants to the Royal Geographical Society, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts and the British Records Association will be increased by 3 per cent. on average in 1985-86. The allocation on the Property Services Agency's vote covering the British Library's new St. Pancras building project will be more than doubled next year, reflecting the path of expenditure on the first construction phase now under way. The Government's decisions on later stages of the project will be announced in due course.

These allocationns are within the arts and libraries programme total given in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement. Plans for 1986-87 and 1987-88 will be set out in the next Public Expenditure White Paper, and be subject to annual review. They will carry forward the general pattern established in 1985-86.

The individual 1985-86 allocations are as follows:

Table of allocations

£ million cash

	1984-85	*1985-86*
ARTS		
Arts Council	100·0	105·0
British Film Institute	7·710	8·075
National Film and Television school	0·990	1·120
Crafts Council	1·777	1·880
Business sponsorship incentive scheme	0·5	1·0
HERITAGE		
National heritage memorial fund (OAL share)	4·0	1·5
Acceptances in lieu (OAL share)	2·0	1·0
MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES		
Purchase grants (including revotes)		
British Museum	1·737	1·460
Imperial War Museum	0·147	0·100
National Gallery	3·331	2·750
National Maritime Museum	0·203	0·205
National Portrait Gallery	0·310	0·310
Science Museum	0·416	0·461
Tate Gallery	2·041	1·815
Victoria and Albert Museum	1·320	1·145
Other net runnings costs (including revotes)		
British Museum	11·128	11·533
Imperial War Museum	4·236	4·345
National Gallery	3·693	3·889
National Maritime Museum	4·101	4·131
National Portrait Gallery	1·556	1·467
Science Museum	7·908	8·493
Tate Gallery	3·554	3·830
Victoria and Albert Museum	8·963	9·453
Wallace Collection	0·823	0·877
Sir John Soane's Museum	0·200	0·212
Museum of London	1·278	1·372
National museums' and galleries' building/ maintenance programme (PSA)	24·8	28·7
Museums and Galleries Commission—administration and AMC/conservation/ capital grants	3.041	3·076
—local museum purchase grants	1·282	1·282
LIBRARIES		
British Library: total current grant	46·850	48·254
British Library building/maintenance (PSA)	3·338	7·245
Royal Geographical Society	0·052	0·054
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts	0·386	0·400
British Records Association	0·012	0·012
Public lending right scheme	2·0	2·75
MISCELLANEOUS GRANTS		
South Bank Theatre Board	0·1	0·6
Government Art Collection	0·144	0·153
Royal Academy Appeal contribution	—	0·25

WALES

Nurses

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total numbers of *(a)* full-time state registered nurses, *(b)* part-time state registered nurses, *(c)* full-time state enrolled nurses and *(d)* part-time state enrolled nurses employed by the National Health Service in Wales (i) at 30 September 1978 and (ii) at 31 March 1984; if he will also express the number of state registered nurses and state enrolled nurses, respectively, at each date in whole-time equivalents; and if he will give the ratios for each date of whole-time equivalent state registered nurses to whole-time equivalent state enrolled nurses.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information for 1978 and 1984, collected at the time of the annual September census of NHS staff, is given in the following table:

	30 September 1978	*30 September 1984*
Number of full-time SRNs	6,666	8,292
Number of part-time SRNs	3,520	3,854
Number of full-time SENs	2,737	3,624
Number of part-time SENs	2,088	2,779
Whole-time equivalent of SRNs	8,654·9	10,567·0
Whole-time equivalent of SENs	4,037·8	5,395·1
Ratio of SRN: SEN (whole-time equivalent)	2·14:1	1·96:1

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average numbers of hours worked per nurse in Wales in the National Health Service *(a)* at 30 September 1978 and *(b)* at 31 March 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is not immediately available. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Dairy Quotas

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a breakdown by county in Wales of the percentage of the total quota relinquished under the dairy produce quota scheme and the percentage reallocated, using the latest available data.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: To date 17·9 million litres of quota have been surrendered in Wales under the outgoers scheme. Reallocation of quota will not take place until the purchase of 2·25 per cent. of the England and Wales quota has been completed. Figures are not available on a county basis.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications to the outgoers scheme in relation to the dairy produce quota scheme in Wales he has received to date; how many have been approved; and at what cost.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: 708 applications to join the outgoers scheme were submitted in Wales. So far offers have been made to 639 producers and of these 207 have accepted surrendering some 17·9 million litres of quota at a cost of around £2·3 million over five years.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many exceptional hardship applications he has received to date relating to the dairy produce quota scheme in Wales; and how many he has approved.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: 994 exceptional hardship case claims were received in Wales. These are currently being considered by the dairy produce quota tribunal for England and Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications he has received for a second quota relating to the dairy produce quota scheme in Wales; and how many have been approved at the latest date.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: 4,736 special case claims for secondary quota were received in Wales. These are currently being considered by the dairy produce quota tribunal for England and Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total milk quota relinquished to date in Wales under the dairy produce quota scheme; and how this compares as a percentage of the total dairy production for the period concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Acceptances of offers made under the outgoers scheme amount to 17·9 million litres in Wales to date (7 December 1984). Milk production in Wales for the period April to October 1984 is provisionally estimated at 984·5 million litres.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have yet to be dealt with under the dairy produce quota scheme for Wales in the following categories: *(a)* the outgoers scheme, *(b)* the exceptional hardship scheme and *(c)* the second quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In Wales 167 producers have yet to accept or decline the offer to join the outgoers scheme, and 69 producers have not yet been invited to join the scheme. The dairy produce quota tribunal are currently considering the 994 exceptional hardship case claims and the 4,736 special case claims submitted in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many more applications he expects to approve under the dairy produce quota scheme for Wales in the following categories: (*a*) the outgoers scheme, (*b*) the exceptional hardships scheme and (*c*) the second quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The intention of the outgoers scheme is to buy in 2·25 per cent. of the total England and Wales quota, and we shall continue to make offers until this target is achieved. No estimates can be made of the outcome of special case and exceptional hardship case claims currently being considered by the dairy produce quota tribunal.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of Wales if he will make a statement on the basis on which judgments for approval are made under the dairy produce quota scheme in the following categories: (*a*) the outgoers scheme, (*b*) the exceptional hardship scheme and (*c*) the second quota scheme; and if he will include any revisions which have been made to the basis for these judgments since its inception.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Under the outgoers scheme priority is being given to the smaller producer who depends mainly upon dairying for his basic income. Exceptional hardship and special case claims are determined by the dairy produce quota tribunal in accordance with published rules of procedure.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if the initial quota to be relinquished under the dairy produce quota scheme in Wales has been revised.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if the basis on which additional quotas are reallocated under the dairy produce quota scheme in Wales has been revised since its inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what amount and percentage of the total reallocated quota under the dairy produce quota scheme has not been subsequently taken up in Wales, at the latest date; and what procedure he will be following for its further re-allocation.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Purchase of the required 2·25 per cent. of the England and Wales quota under the outgoers scheme must be completed before reallocation can take place.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the exchange system between wholesale and direct sales quota as it is operating in Wales under the dairy produce quota scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Arrangements are in hand to introduce a system of exchanging direct and wholesale quotas. Consultations are taking place with interested parties with a view to setting up this system as quickly as possible and details will be publicised in due course.

Tourism

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the budget of the Wales Tourist Board for the present financial year; and if he will give the figures for the previous three financial years.

Mr. Edwards: The allocations to the Wales Tourist Board are as follows:

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*£ million 1984-85*
Grant-in-aid	3·172	3·580	3·875	4·565
Assistance to tourist projects	1·911	1·985	1·209	1·800
Total	5·083	5·565	5·084	6·365

Feliheli Bypass

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state *(a)* from what date a route was protected for the Feliheli bypass on the A487, *(b)* at what date an inquiry held into possible route alternatives, *(c)* when work was commenced on detailed plans for the bypass, *(d)* when he intends to make a decision regarding the definite route for the bypass and *(e)* when work on the bypass is scheduled to be undertaken.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

River Conwy (Tunnel)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated extra cost of the extension of the tunnel under the Conwy estuary and the adoption of a different form of construction on the western approach to the tunnel.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: About £3·6 million.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passports

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons British citizens may be refused passports; and how many such refusals took place in each category in 1984 to date, and during each of the previous three years.

Mr. Waddington: United Kingdom nationals may be refused passport facilities only when an application is made in respect of:

(a) A minor whose journey is known to be contrary to a court order, to the wishes of a parent or other person or authority to whom a court has awarded custody, care and control, or to the provisions of section 25(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, as amended, or section 52 of the Adoption Act 1958, as amended;

(b) A person for whose arrest a warrant has been issued in the United Kingdom, or who is wanted by the United Kingdom police on suspicion of a serious crime;

(c) In very rare cases, a person whose past or proposed activities are so demonstrably undesirable that the grant or continued enjoyment of passport facilities would be contrary to the public interest;

(d) A person repatriated at public expense, until the debt has been repaid.

Records of refusals are maintained only for the category *(c)*. These are extremely rare and there were none in the period specified.

Association of Chief Police officers

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, the chair of each committee and the composition of each committee.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The nature and composition of the association's committees are a matter for the association.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place copies of the minutes of the Association of Chief Police Officers' committee meetings in the Library.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the progress of police inquiries into the disappearance of log books from HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that police inquiries into the disappearance of the log books are continuing.

Fire Authorities (Industrial Disputes)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to fire authorities concerning the involvement by firemen in industrial disputes, such as the current miners' dispute, unrelated to their own employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None, This is the responsibility of the management of local authority fire brigades in the light of firemen's conditions of service and the Fire Services (Discipline) Regulations 1948.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will continue on a permanent basis the availability of blood and urine tests for persons tested with evidential breath-testing machines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Blood or urine tests are available under the provisions of the Transport Act 1981 for any person tested with an evidential breath-testing machine whose breath-test reading is between the legal limit of 35 microgrammes per hundred millilitres of breath and 50 microgrammes per hundred millilitres of breath. My right hon. and learned friend will consider whether the non-statutory option of a blood/urine test for those whose breath alcohol readings are over 50 microgrammes, introduced last April, should continue when he receives the report on the six-month experimental monitoring of breath tests by the forensic science service.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists convicted of drink-driving offences following the introduction of the Lion Intoximeter have subsequently been pardoned; how many such cases are currently under consideration; whether he intends to continue allowing any motorists so charged to take also a blood test; and if he plans to offer any financial compensation to those convicted and subsequently pardoned.

Mr. Mellor: Free pardons have been granted in five cases involving the use of the Lion Intoximeter and recommended in eight others. No other cases of this kind are under consideration. It is not the practice of my right hon. and learned Friend to pay compensation when a free pardon is granted in a case where a non-custodial sentence has been imposed. As to the availability of blood or urine tests, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given today to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels).

Fingerprints and Photographs

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there has been any change in the standard practice of destroying fingerprints and police photographs of persons who have been acquitted; and whether any new guidelines on the subject have recently been issued.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am aware of no such change. However, the code of practice on identification to be made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and already published in draft, will lay down detailed requirements governing the taking and destruction of fingerprints and photographs. Section 64 of the Act itself will require the destruction of fingerprints if the person is cleared of the offence.

Data Protection

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Data Protection Registrar will be made aware of the existence of any certificate which exempts personal data under section 27 of the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Waddington: Part IV of the Data Protection Act 1984 exempts a number of categories of personal data from the provisions of the Act, including data whose exemption is required for the purpose of safeguarding national security: in no case does the Act require the registrar to be made aware of data to which an exemption is being applied. If any question were to arise whether data were properly exempt under section 27 a certificate would at that point need to be produced to justify the exemption.

Visiting Forces Act

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the Visiting Forces Act in such a way as to prevent the United States authorities claiming primary jurisdiction over British law for United States service men who have, in the course of their duties, shot a United Kingdom citizen.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Costs (Books)

Mr. Crouch asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how the increase in the cost of books, periodicals and binding compared with the cost of all non-pay items in the index of university costs during the period November 1980 to July 1984.

Mr. Brooke: The indices of changes in university recurrent costs prepared on behalf of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals show that between November 1980 and 1 July 1984 the cost of books, periodicals and binding increased by 68·7 per cent. compared with an increase of 32 per cent. for all non-pay items (the index of non-pay items includes employers' National Insurance contributions and excludes local authority rates).

Classical Languages

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of the teaching of classical languages in maintained schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Department's 1981 publication "The School Curriculum" recognised that the study of classical languages introduces pupils to broad aspects of history and culture as well as to the disciplines of language and literature, and suggested that the teaching of classical subjects might benefit if provision were planned as a whole across local education authority areas. The place of classics in the school curriculum was also raised in the Department's discussion paper "The Organisation and Content of the 5-16 Curriculum", issued in September, on which comments were invited. A copy is available in the Library.

Non-invasive Procedures (Research)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what support his Department is

giving to research into non-invasive procedures using biofeedback and electrical stimulation techniques to improve motor function after spinal cord injury.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid through the Department, is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical research in the United Kingdom. I understand that the coucil is currently supporting projects at Hammersmith hospital and the university of Hull on nerve and muscle function which could prove relevant to spinal cord injury. The council also supports a considerable amount of other basic research which may turn out to have a bearing on this kind of injury.

Parental Contributions

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out a precis of the information available in his Department concerning the numbers of dependent children pertaining to those parents deemed to be paying parental contributions, setting out where possible the numbers of families by family size.

Mr. Brooke: In 1982-83, there were some 255,000 students for whom a parental contribution was assessed. Information on the number of families involved or on family size is not available.

North London Polytechnic

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the polytechnic of north London was last inspected by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: In the last two years Her Majesty's inspectors have inspected and reported on the following courses at the polytechnic of north London:

Course	*Date Inspected*
Non-graduate certificate of qualification in social work	November 1982
BSc sociology and BA applied social studies	April/May 1983
BA contemporary European studies	April/May 1983
Science and engineering degrees	October 1983

There will be further inspections as appropriate.

Support Grants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the successful and unsuccessful bids of local education authorities for education support grants.

Sir Keith Joseph: The information requested is shown in the following table:

	Number of categories of activity in respect of which bids for education support grants were submitted for the 1985-86 financial year	*Number of categories of activity in respect of which an amount of expenditure has been approved as eligible for support by education support grants in the 1985-86 financial year*
Barking	6	4
Barnet	7	4
Bexley	7	6
Brent	10	7
Bromley	5	5
Croydon	10	9
Ealing	9	4
Enfield	7	5
Haringey	8	8
Harrow	7	5
Havering	8	6
Hillingdon	9	7
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	7	5
Merton	6	3
Newham	9	7
Redbridge	6	5
Richmond-upon-Thames	9	4
Sutton	6	3
Waltham Forest	8	7
ILEA	10	9
Birmingham	10	7
Coventry	9	7
Dudley	10	5
Sandwell	8	5
Solihull	8	5
Walsall	9	6
Wolverhampton	10	5
Knowsley	7	4
Liverpool	8	8
St. Helens	9	6
Sefton	1	1
Wirral	9	6
Bolton	9	6
Bury	8	5
Manchester	10	8
Oldham	9	5
Rochdale	9	5
Salford	9	6
Stockport	6	5
Tameside	9	8
Trafford	9	6
Wigan	9	5
Barnsley	7	5
Doncaster	9	7
Rotherham	10	7
Sheffield	10	7
Bradford	10	8
Calderdale	9	6
Kirklees	8	7
Leeds	10	8
Wakefield	10	6
Gateshead	8	5
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	10	7
North Tyneside	10	6
South Tyneside	8	6
Sunderland	6	4
Avon	10	4
Bedfordshire	8	6
Berkshire	11	6
Buckinghamshire	9	6
Cambridgeshire	9	6
Cheshire	7	3
Cleveland	8	7
Cornwall	9	7
Cumbria	9	6
Derbyshire	11	6
Devon	10	6
Dorset	9	7
Durham	9	5

	Number of categories of activity in respect of which bids for education support grants were submitted for the 1985-86 financial year	*Number of categories of activity in respect of which an amount of expenditure has been approved as eligible for support by education support grants in the 1985-86 financial year*
East Sussex	7	5
Essex	9	7
Gloucestershire	10	8
Hampshire	8	6
Hereford and Worcester	9	6
Hertfordshire	8	6
Humberside	10	7
Isle of Wight	8	4
Kent	11	6
Lancashire	10	8
Leicestershire	11	9
Lincolnshire	9	5
Norfolk	8	6
North Yorkshire	8	6
Northamptonshire	10	8
Northumberland	9	6
Nottinghamshire	4	4
Oxfordshire	10	8
Salop	8	6
Somerset	10	7
Staffordshire	9	6
Suffolk	8	7
Surrey	7	5
Warwickshire	7	5
West Sussex	8	6
Wiltshire	9	8

Note: DES circular 6/84 invited authorities to bid for education support grant in support of expenditure on up to 11 categories of activity.

Student Unions

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will estimate the cost to public funds of contributions on the students' behalf to compulsory membership of student unions;

(2) if he will consider introducing legislation to provide for the voluntary membership of student unions;

(3) if he will estimate the savings to his Department if membership of student unions were made voluntary.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. *594*]: Student union funds are allocated from the total resources available to the institution of which the union is a constituent part. The total amount of such funds is not known, but they are substantially used for the provision of welfare, sports and social services within the institutions.

The Government believe that these services need to be provided by one means or another. Thus, any possible saving to public funds resulting from a change to voluntary membership of student unions would be small. Membership of student unions could only be made voluntary through the removal of the existing provisions of charters and statutes, and articles of government, under which such membership is automatic. My right hon. Friend has no intention at present of legislating to amend the status of student unions.

ENVIRONMENT

Building Regulations

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy not to alter the building regulations so as to permit an increase in the heat loss from buildings.

Mr. Gow: My policy is to recast the building regulations so as to simplify them and the procedures involved, while maintaining substantially the standards required, including those for the conservation of fuel and power.

Housing Associations

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants of charitable housing associations are excluded from the right-to-buy provisions of the Housing and Building Control Act because their properties were not funded by the housing association grant section 29 of the Housing Act 1974.

Sir George Young: All tenants of charitable housing associations are excluded from the right to buy because of sections 2(1) and 2(2)*(a)* of the Housing Act 1980. Some tenants are eligible for the home ownership scheme introduced under section 35 of the Housing and Building Control Act 1984. We estimate that some 80,000 to 100,000 households will be excluded from that scheme solely because housing association grant has not been paid in respect of their homes in accordance with the criteria in section 35(1).

Greater London Development Plan

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will submit the Greater London council's alterations to the Greater London development plan to a public inquiry.

Mr. Macfarlane: No. My right hon. Friend has already announced that he has invoked section 6(1) of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, which allows him to defer consideration of the GLC's proposed alterations.

Housing (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to expand the capacity of his Department to undertake research and collect information on London's housing to compensate for the loss of the Greater London council's duty to assess London's housing needs, in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Sir George Young: No. It will be for the councils of the London boroughs to continue such research as they consider necessary, acting individually or under the collective arrangements provided for by clause 83 of the Local Government Bill.

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider undertaking a survey of those local authorities in coal mining areas to ascertain the

financial problems that are arising on expenditure due to the continuation of the miners' strike, with a view to their exemption from financial penalties if the study reveals an increased financial burden.

Mr. Waldegrave: If local authorities ask for such expenditure to be disregarded my right hon. Friend will consider their representations.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ascertain from local authorities in coal mining areas the extent to which they are incurring extra financial expenditure due to granting financial assistance under the Child Care Act because of the continuation of the mining dispute with a view to exempting them from financial penalties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have nothing to add to my reply of 10 December 1984 at column *395*.

Tip Sites (Waste)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will hold a public inquiry into the excavation, transfer and dumping of waste material from the former tip known as the Glory Hole at Eastney, Portsmouth.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend sees no occasion for doing this.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what responsibility his Department has to ensure that the excavation of former tip sites is carried out safely; and what guidelines exist for the excavation, transfer and dumping of waste from such sites which may or may not be toxic.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department has no direct responsibility for the excavation of former tip sites. The issues arising are primarily ones for the local authorities or, in the case of the safety of the workers engaged in the excavation, the Health and Safety Executive. Advice on problems relating to the redevelopment of contaminated land is available from the Department through the interdepartmental committee on the redevelopment of contaminated land. Further advice on the practical aspects of waste disposal is provided by the Department through its publication of waste management papers and through ad hoc guidance.

Empty Houses

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many empty houses in Rutter Close, West Drayton, Middlesex, are owned or managed by the Property Services Agency; when they will be sold or leased; and if he will take urgent action to ensure that they are occupied.

Mr. Gow: There are 46 surplus houses in Rutters Close, of which 43 are vacant. All are owned by the Ministry of Defence. These properties have been passed to the Property Services Agency for disposal. Private agents have been appointed and they will be offered on the open market for sale en bloc by tender early in the new year; 27 February 1985 has been set as the tender closing date. The sale is expected to be completed by early April 1985.

Accumulated Capital Receipts

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why the regulations covering the case of accumulated capital receipts have been altered and tightened since the scheme was first introduced;

(2) if it is planned to reduce the restrictions currently in existence that prevent the use of all accumulated capital receipts for making good housing defects.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend will be making a statement about the arrangements for capital expenditure programmes later this week.

Rugby Borough Council

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total amount of Government funding provided to Rugby borough council in each year since 1977-78; and how that compares with the amount raised from the authority's domestic ratepayers for the same period.

Mr. Waldegrave: The answer is as follows:

£ million

	1977-78	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Needs and resources element	3·289	3·730	4·951	5·944	0·052	—	—	—
Block grant	—	—	—	—	1·254	1·421	1·410	1·397
Relevant specific grants	0·200	0·235	0·279	0·237	0·348	0·501	0·618	0·863
Non-relevant specific grants				0·135	0·078	0·139	0·592	n.a.
Amount raised from Rugby domestic ratepayers	..	..	..	..	6·9	7·6	7·4	7·9

.. Not readily available.

Notes:

1. Based on returns from Rugby borough council. 1981-82—1983-84 outturn, 1984-85 budgets.
2. Domestic rates raised are based on Rugby borough council local rate and Warwickshire county council precept, net of domestic rate relief grant (which has also been excluded from the grants shown in the table) and rate rebates.
3. The grants shown are those readily available and do not form a complete list.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much funding has been provided to Rugby borough council under the housing improvement programme for each year since the programme's inception; and how that compares with the amount raised by Rugby borough council.

Sir George Young: Details of the housing investment programme allocations to Rugby borough council since

1978-79 and the amount of its housing capital receipts which the council has been able, since 1981-82, to use to supplement those allocations are as follows:

HIP Allocations and Prescribed proportion of capital receipts arising in year

	£ million	£ million
1978-79	3·2	—
1979-80	4·3	—
1980-81	3·3	—
1981-82	3·0	0·5
1982-83	4·3	1·3
1983-84	5·1	1·5
1984-85	5·2	*

* not yet known

Local Government Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Higgins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he now proposes to take to admit part-time employees into the local government superannuation scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have now made considerable progress in finding solutions to the problems we have faced with these proposals, and my right hon. Friend hopes to be able to make an announcement very soon.

Acceptances in Lieu of Tax

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current position in respect of acceptances in lieu of tax in 1984-85; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The provision in the votes of the Office of Arts and Libraries and the Department of the Environment for acceptances in lieu of tax in 1984-85 is £4 million, including the £2 million towards the purchase of land and chattels at Calke Abbey announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 13 March 1984. During the current year the Government have already accepted drawings by Epstein, a painting by Renoir, sculptures, manuscripts, furniture, and heritage land at Birdoswald and Ty Canol Wood at a cost of £1·4 million. We also expect to conclude other acceptances, and to complete an agreement on Calke Abbey.

These acquisitions represent a successful year for heritage protection, and have been accompanied by a build-up of offers. However, the resources available for acceptances this year and next, which have to provide for the acquisition of Calke, are limited. As a result it will be necessary during the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86 for the Government to be increasingly highly selective in considering those offers already received and any new ones. In reaching decisions we will look for strong evidence that acceptance in lieu on behalf of the taxpayer, bearing in mind the substantial tax incentive to the offerer, represents especially good value for money.

Provision for the protection of the heritage is already substantial. It is spread over various public programmes, including support for the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, the purchase grants for public museums and galleries, and assistance through the National Heritage memorial fund as well as acceptances in lieu. The private treaty sale system also provides considerable tax related incentives to both sellers and public collections.

The Government will continue to keep the balance of these provisions, and the scope for their improvement, under review, with the objective of ensuring that the resources available for maintaining the national heritage remain at an appropriate level.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the continuation of the publishing activities of the Ordnance Survey in the field of road atlases, town plans and guides.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *655-56*]: The Government's policy on the commercial activities of Ordnance Survey has not changed since it was stated in the 'Guidelines for Ordnance Survey Commercial Activities' which were published in July this year.

Nuclear Waste (Billingham)

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why a statement on the proposals to deposit intermediate level nuclear waste in the disused anhydrite mine at Billingham is not to be made before the Christmas recess, as was promised on the occasion of the Minister's visit to the area in October.

Mr. Waldegrave: The appropriate management of nuclear wastes is an important issue, and I know the concern which exists in the hon. Member's constituency. The Government regret that it has not been possible to resolve the matter in the time scale originally envisaged. The Government will not, however, allow the further delay to be prolonged: a statement will be made shortly after Parliament returns. In considering possible sites identified by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive for disposal facilities, the Government has to have regard to the overall strategy for waste management, as well as to the quasi-judicial function which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would have if a planning application were to be submitted.

Rates Act 1984

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many letters he has received since 17 January concerning the provisions of the Rates Act 1984 from people living in the designated authorities, indicating how many letters have come from people in each constituency covered wholly or in part by the 18 authorities;

(2) if he will publish for each authority designated under the Rates Act 1984 the assumptions he has made in respect of (i) exclusive penny rate products, (ii) expenditure for 1983-84 and 1984-85, (iii) rate fund revenue balances, (iv) special fund balances, (v) capital fund balances, (vi) *(a)* trading account balances in respect of public transport and *(b)* other trading account balances, (vii) housing revenue account balances and (viii) balances of other funds and other credit balances excluding those in respect of liabilities, capital discharged and capital receipts, in determining their provisional maximum rates;

(3) if he will publish for each authority designated under the Rates Act 1984 the estimated block grant entitlements he has taken into account in determining the

provisional maximum rate; and what are (i) the assumptions made about that authority's expenditure in 1985-86 and (ii) the assumptions made about all non-designated authorities' expenditure in 1985-86, in determining that grant entitlement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I will answer these questions shortly.

Romney Marshes

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Nature Conservancy Council will conduct an inquiry into the effects of the Southern water authority's action in spraying Romney marshes with Dalapan in the spring.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised that the Nature Conservancy Council and the Southern water authority intend to undertake a joint research project to look into the effects of herbicides on the flora, fauna and water quality of dykes in the Romney Marsh area. It is proposed to commence a three-year study in the Spring of 1985.

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations the Nature Conservancy Council had with the Southern water authority as required under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, section 15 of the Countryside Act 1968 and section 22 of the Water Act 1973 in respect of the spraying of Dalapan on Romney Marshes in the spring.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Nature Conservancy Council and the Southern water authority met recently to discuss the future use of herbicides on Romney Marshes. The water authority has agreed not to spray Dalapan from helicopters within the area notified as a site of special scientific interest, but have not ruled out the localised use of Dalapan or other chemicals within the site of special scientific interest. A further meeting between the water authority and the NCC to discuss the future management of the dykes within the SSSI will be held in January.

PRIME MINISTER

Malta (Bomb Disposal)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government have given any assistance to the Government of Malta for the disposal of unexploded second world war bombs and mines in the waters around the island.

The Prime Minister: In September we provided the services of a Royal Navy hydrographer to advise the Maltese Government on this question. We subsequently indicated to the Maltese Government our readiness to conduct a full hydrographic survey and an underwater search for unexploded ordnance, subject to agreement on terms of reference; and to consider, in the light of any such survey and search what further assistance it might prove possible to offer. Exchanges between the Governments are continuing.

Government Policies (Representations)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Prime Minister on which issues over the last 12 months apart from student grants she has received more than 30,000 representations.

The Prime Minister: There have been two such issues: the 'Save the Swans' campaign against the use of lead by anglers; and a Soviet postcard campaign about disarmament.

International Youth Year

Mr. Murphy asked the Prime Minister how Her Majesty's Government intend to mark International Youth Year.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 16 November at column *373*.

Price Changes (Calculation)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Prime Minister what measures Her Majesty's Government use of relative price changes beside the retail price index; and whether any of these measure relative price changes affecting elderly people specifically.

The Prime Minister: Besides the retail prices index, commonly used measures of domestic price changes include the producer price indices (the price index for materials and fuel purchased by manufacturing industry and the price index for home sales of manufactured products); the price deflators for gross domestic product and total final expenditure, the consumers' expenditure price deflator and the tax and price index. There are also the quaterly one and two-person pensioner price indices which are specifically designed to show the impact of price changes on the expenditure of one-person and two-person pensioner households.

United Nations General Assembly (Ministerial Speeches)

Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister whether she will set out in tabular form, with dates, those Ministers who have addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation, or any of its committees, during the current autumn session of the Assembly; and what were the particular debates in which they spoke.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs spoke in the general debate in plenary on 26 September. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce), Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, spoke in the general debate of the First Committee on 1 November.

"Consultancy, Inspection and Review Services in Government Departments"

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Prime Minister what recommendations she intends to issue arising from the report released earlier this month by the Civil Service efficiency unit entitled "Consultancy, Inspection and Review Services in Government Departments".

The Prime Minister: The report introduces a further stage in the management reforms begun in 1982, which are intended to ensure that those who work in Government feel a personal responsibility to increase value for money and can act accordingly. I endorse the report's recommendations, which are addressed to Ministers and Permanent

Secretaries in charge of Departments. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 12 December at column *493* the creation of a joint management unit to support top management in the Treasury and Cabinet Office. One of the unit's first tasks will be to assist Departments in implementing the report.

Visits (Far East)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on when she now hopes to make these visits to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and other capital cities postponed from last September.

The Prime Minister: I hope to be able to reinstate my visit to south-east Asia and Sri Lanka during 1985 but it is not yet possible to take a firm decision on dates.

Digital Equipment Corporation

Mr. Ashdown asked the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government were *(a)* aware of, *(b)* consulted about and *(c)* agreed to the visits made by United States officials from an unknown United States Government agency to the Digital Equipment Corporation offices in Reading in 1982 and 1983.

The Prime Minister: I am informed by the Digital Equipment Company that it has no record of any such visits in 1982 or 1983.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Alvey Programme

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of firms participating in or benefiting from the Alvey programme are *(a)* defence contractors, *(b)* not connected with defence contracts and *(c)* first-time users.

Mr. Pattie: The majority of the 50 or so firms now participating in the Alvey programme have interests in both civil and defence applications of IT but some of the smaller firms are not defence contractors. Generally only experienced users can contribute directly to an advanced technology programme but we have specifically created some clubs to give companies a first exposure to the latest techniques.

British Telecommunications plc

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees of British Telecommunications plc there are in Northern Ireland; and how many of these employees it is estimated applied for shares in the recent public offer.

Mr. Butcher: As at 30 November there were 4,845 BT employees in Northern Ireland but a breakdown of applications by geographical area is not available. However, 96 per cent. of all eligible employees in the United Kingdom applied for shares.

Company Share Dealings (Investigations)

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the companies or persons investigated under sections 68 to 70 of the Companies Act 1980 indicating those cases which were referred for prosecution; and if he will arrange for copies of all the investigations to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Fletcher: Dealings in the shares of 73 companies have led to such investigations being undertaken or considered. Each investigation typically involves many individuals. Neither they nor the company are named unless criminal proceedings are instituted. Particulars of the cases brought are as follows:

Defendant	*Relevant share*	*Verdict*
John Bryce	Winterbottom Trust Ltd.	Guilty
John Titheridge	Joseph Stocks & Sons (Holdings) Ltd.	Guilty
Joyce Titheridge		Guilty
John Allen Crump Dickenson	Harris & Sheldon Group Ltd.	Guilty
Colin Kettle Neil Thorneywork	Blockley plc	Not guilty
Awaiting trial		
David John Brooks Ronald John Hancock	Suter Electrical Ltd.	

Car Imports Quotas

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to encourage Ford and Vauxhall to surrender unused Spanish import quotas to Austin Rover.

Mr. Channon: The Spanish authorities have made no announcement of their allocation of the reduced duty quotas for cars. The details are therefore confidential to the Spanish Government and each company. Before the expiry of the 1983-84 quotas the United Kingdom pressed the Spanish authorities to carry forward and redistribute any unused allocations, and drew attention to Austin Rover's case for benefitting from this. No such carry forward in fact took place although Austin Rover did, we understand, receive an increased allocation. We intend to make similar representations to Spain before the quotas are next renewed.

Cellular Radio

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to co-ordinate with other European countries the future regulations to cover the second generation of cellular radio.

Mr. Butcher: Work on a harmonised European specification for the second generation of cellular radio is currently being carried out by a special group established by the Conference of European Posts and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT). The group has been charged with producing an outline specification by the end of 1986 for implementation by the early 1990's. The Department is actively participating in this work.

Licensed Premises (Price Lists)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the recorded figures for complaints made by the public against licensees who have not displayed price lists in their premises in a prominent place.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that figures for such complaints are not available. If any person considers that a licensee is not complying with the provisions of the Price Marking

(Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979 they should contact their local trading standards department who are responsible for enforcing the legislation.

Assisted Areas (Manchester)

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why in schedule 2 to the Assisted Areas Order 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1844), he has designated the city of Manchester intermediate area on the basis of obsolete ward boundaries, so that certain existing wards within the designated area are not listed, wards which have been abolished are listed, and certain existing wards have been designated on obsolete rather than current boundaries.

Mr. Trippier: All travel-to-work areas in England and Wales are defined by reference to 1981 census wards. The Manchester assisted area was defined so as to mesh in smoothly with those adjoining travel-to-work areas which are assisted.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what has been the average time between application and first payment of regional development grant prior to recent changes;

(2) what he expects to be the average time interval between first application and the first payment of regional development grants under the procedures announced on 28 November.

Mr. Trippier: Regional development grants under the old scheme are paid in respect of approved expenditure incurred in providing new capital assets on qualifying premises. In the period 6 January 1984 to 14 September 1984 the average time between the receipt of an application for grant and the payment of grant was just under seven weeks. Under the new scheme grant will be payable in respect of new capital assets provided, or jobs created, within the context of an approved project.

The average interval between a claim for grant and the payment of grant will depend on a range of factors, in particular the volume of claims. When claimants and staff have experience of the new system it should be possible to make payments in respect of claims within about the same time as hitherto under the old scheme.

Information Technology

Dr McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all the Government or Government-sponsored organisations concerned with the promotion of information technology, research and development into information technology, its application to industry, and the training of experts in information technology.

Mr. Butcher: In the time available the following Government or Government-sponsored organisations have been identified as being concerned on a continuing basis with the activities listed in the question:

Department of Trade and Industry and associated research establishments.
Department of Education and Science.
Ministry of Defence and associated research establishments.
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency, Treasury.
Manpower Services Commission.
The Information Technology Advisory Panel.
The British Information Technology Export Organisation (EXPORT IT).
The National Computing Centre.
United Kingdom AEA Harwell.
The Civil Service college.
The Federation of Microsystems Centres.
The University Consortium for Industrial Numerical Analysis.
The United Kingdom Council for Computing Development.
The British Standards Institute.
The Production Engineering Research Association.
The Machine Tools Industry Research Association.
The Engineering Industry Training Board.
The IT Users Standards Association.
The National Computer User Forum.
The joint networks team of the Computer Board and Research Councils.
The National Interactive Video Centre.
The Engineering Council.
The British Technology Group.
The Advisory Body of Research Councils.
The Advisory Council on Advanced Research and Development.
The Business and Technicians Education Council.
Information Technology Education Centres (149).
Science and Technology Regional Organisations (40).

In addition a large number of individual firms or other organisations receive financial support for specific projects. The Government obviously has responsibility for the funding of IT-related activities in universities and polytechnics.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the total amount of Government financial support for information technology for each year from 1978-79.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Trade and Industry's financial support for electronics and information technology is published with information on other research and development support in annual DTI reports. The report for 1978-79 is entitled "Research and Development Requirements and Programmes Report"; the more recent reports are entitled "Research and Development Report". The report for 1983-84 is to be published on 31 January 1985.

Tourism

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the present annual budgets for *(a)* the English Tourist Board and *(b)* the British Tourist Authority; and if he will give similar figures for the previous three financial years.

Mr. Butcher: The following table shows the sums of money provided by my Department to these boards including money for grants under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969. The figures for 1984-85 are estimates.

£ million

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
English Tourist Board	8·6	10·4	8·6	8·8
Section 4 grants	4·0	4·5	6·3	8·4
British Tourist Authority	16·2	18·1	17·0	16·8
Total	28·8	33·0	31·9	34·0

Hotel and Catering Industry

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the changes in development area status affect grants for improvements or new building work in the hotel and catering industry in what were development or assisted areas.

Mr. Trippier: Regional selective assistance is rarely given to the hotel and catering industry because tourism and tourism-related projects are normally considered for selective aid under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969, which covers the whole of Great Britain. The changes to the assisted areas will not affect assistance under that Act, which is available for all types of tourism development. Selective regional assistance will be available to eligible projects on the basis of the old map of assisted areas provided that the application was received before 28 November.

Regional development grants have been available in respect of approved capital expenditure incurred on the provision of new capital assets (including buildings and works) on premises used wholly or mainly for qualifying activities. The premises had to be in a development (or special development) area. The hotel and catering industry as such was not a qualifying activity, but industrial canteens were typically located on qualifying premises.

Grant is still payable under the old scheme, and on the basis of the former map of assisted areas, in respect of expenditure defrayed before 29 November 1984, assets provided before 29 November 1985, or assets provided under certain categories of project in receipt of selective assistance or of an offer of such assistance made before 29 November 1984.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make an announcement about the future of the loan guarantee scheme beyond the end of 1984.

Mr. Trippier: I have decided that, although the experimental scheme has not fulfilled its original goal of breaking even, it should be extended for a further year to the end of 1985. However, in order to contain costs, I am imposing a ceiling on lending in the calendar year 1985 of £50 million. The main terms of the scheme will remain unchanged, with the Government guaranteeing 70 per cent. of loans made by participating lenders and charging a 5 per cent. premium on the amount guaranteed. As now, no personal security will be taken on scheme loans but in future where an applicant has such security which he is unwilling to pledge against a commercial loan he will not be eligible for a scheme loan. In order to improve the survival rate amongst scheme borrowers, I shall be asking lenders to insist on minimum standards of appraisal and financial reporting from all applicants.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid out in regional development grants for *(a)* oil-related projects and *(b)* other projects in the Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline travel-to-work areas in each year since 1979; and how many companies have benefited.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have been asked to reply.

I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

ENERGY

Nuclear Plants and Facilities

12. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the negotiations between the United Kingdom Government and Euratom concerning a mutually satisfactory inspection regime for British nuclear plants and facilities.

Mr. Goodlad: All civil nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom with the exception of the mixed civil-military processing plants at Springfields and Sellafield are regularly inspected by the Eurotom Safeguards organ isation. The United Kingdom Government have made proposals to Eurotam for inspection regimes for these plants which take account of the fact that they handle both civil and military material. These proposals are at present under consideration by Euratom.

Departmental Running Costs

19. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department is continuing its successful action to reduce running costs. Its cash provision for running costs in 1985-86 is expected to be approximately the same as its expenditure two years earlier, representing a reduction of roughly 9 per cent. in real terms.

Electricity Generation

23. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what financial support his Department gives towards research and investment for the building of an economic, non-pollutant coal gasification plant for the provision of electricity generating capacity.

Mr. David Hunt: The Department of Energy is providing up to £500,000 for a study of a commercial-scale power station using British Gas coal gasification technology. This technology offers the prospect of substantially reduced sulphur emissions without the economic penalties associated with established sulphur removal processes.

28. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of electricity generated by the Central Electricity Generating Board was produced from coal, on a fuel used basis, for the period March to September; and how this compares with the same period in 1983.

Mr. Goodlad: On a fuel used basis, 52 per cent. of the electricity produced by the Central Electricity Generating Board in the period March to September 1984 was derived from coal compared with 81 per cent. in the equivalent period in 1983.

Redundant Mineworkers Payments Scheme

24. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with representatives of opencast coal mining workers about the redundant mineworkers payments scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: In discussion with representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union, my right hon.

Friend has pointed out that the prospects for opencast mining appear to be good and unlikely to give rise to large-scale redundancies consequent upon restructuring.

Coal Industry Dispute

25. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the effects of the mining dispute.

27. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the dispute in the mining industry.

31. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the dispute between the National Coal Board and the miners on strike.

37. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he will next meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to consider the current dispute in the coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer hon. Members to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth).

Solent (Oil Exploration)

26. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received concerning the allocation of a licence to Shell (UK) Ltd. to search for oil in the Solent.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I have received representations from a number of people and organisations. Virtually all have been concerned about protection of the environment and the amenity of the area.

35. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has received from the Shell company for the deployment of exploration rigs in the Solent.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No plans have been received and none are expected in the near future. Further geological surveys have to be undertaken before any proposals for drilling can be prepared. No well can be drilled without my consent.

Coal Industry (Subsidy)

29. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the total of public funds used to subsidise the coal industry since 1954; and if he will give any figures he has for comparable data for other Western countries.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 1954, grants accrued in the NCB's accounts, capital write-offs and expenditure on the redundant mineworkers payments scheme have totalled over £5 billion. I regret that comparable figures over this period for other Western countries are not available.

Opencast Mining (Ayrshire)

30. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what recent discussions he has had with the National Coal Board on opencast mining in Ayrshire.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Wind Power

32. **Mr. Burt** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on experiments currently funded by his Department in the field of wind power.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is funding the construction of a 3-megawatt, 60-metre diameter wind turbine on Orkney and a novel 25-metre diameter vertical axis machine at Carmarthen bay, together with supporting research. Studies carried out by the Department show that wind power seems to be one of the most attractive renewable sources for generating electricity. We therefore intend to continue research and development to find out how large, and how cost-effective, a contribution it could make to electricity supply in Britain.

Energy Efficiency Scheme (Grants)

33. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many applications his Department has received for grants under the energy efficiency scheme since its inception on 1 January; and what proportion of those applications has been successful.

Mr. David Hunt: Up until 6 December 1984, the Energy Efficiency Office had received the following applications for energy efficiency survey grants:

Extended surveys	:	535
Short surveys	:	1809
Combined heat & power feasibility studies	:	14

Virtually all applications were successful: only one application for an extended and four applications for short surveys were rejected. Eleven further applicants for extended survey grants were advised to apply for short survey grants instead.

We expect surveys carried out with the aid of these grants—totalling £1·4 million—to identify savings worth over £60 million a year.

Energy Efficiency Office

34. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many local authorities have contacted the Energy Efficiency Office, in the current financial year, to seek advice on energy management.

Mr. David Hunt: Over 250 local authorities have already sought advice from the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mining Industry (Workers' Co-operatives)

36. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will consider encouraging the setting up of workers' co-operatives in the mining industry.

Mr. David Hunt: I have stated that I am always willing to consider any such proposal, but the NUM has shown no enthusiasm for this approach.

Nuclear Plants (Safeguards)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy how the erasing of information from the computer memory of Central Electricity Generating Board computers on the isotopic composition of plutonium created in the United Kingdom civil nuclear power programme facilitates the implementations of safeguards in British nuclear plants and facilities.

Mr. Goodlad: All the data required by the safeguards authorities regarding isotopic composition of discharged fuel are available at individual power stations.

North Sea

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the amount of North sea supply work secured by British-owned firms.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: In 1983 the total value of orders reported by operators for oil and gas development work on the United Kingdom continental shelf was £2·61 billion. British based companies won 72 per cent.—£1·88 billion—of these orders.

Separate records are not kept of the value of orders won by British owned companies.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list for the years 1975 to 1984 the numbers of workers employed in North sea related work *(a)* onshore in Scotland and *(b)* offshore.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have been asked to reply.

The information in the form requested is not available. Total employment in firms in Scotland identified by the Manpower Services Commission as being wholly related to North sea oil and gas activity is estimated to have been as follows for the period 1975-1984.

June	*Thousands*
1975	20·1
1976	27·1
1977	28·6
1978	34·0
1979	41·8
1980	46·3
1981	50·0
1982	58·3
1983	63·3
1984	64·0

These figures include offshore work undertaken by companies in Scotland but do not include employment in oil-related construction projects in Scotland or in firms partly involved in oil and oil-related activity.

Offshore employment in the United Kingdom sector of the northern North sea (ie the waters east of Scotland and in the Shetland basin) is estimated to have been in the following ranges.

	Offshore Employment	
June 1980	21,000	to 23,000
July 1981	23,000	to 25,500
July 1982	21,500	to 24,000
July 1983	26,500	to 28,500

The figures are based on the Inland Revenue survey of offshore employment in companies with offshore production and exploration licences for blocks on the UKCS. They should not be directly compared with the MSC figures on employment in wholly oil-related firms in Scotland because of differences in coverage and method of compilation.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many *(a)* pipe-laying barges, *(b)* oil rigs and *(c)* supply vessels now operating in the North sea are registered in Britain.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The information requested at November 1984 is, respectively, *(a)* None *(b)* 14 and *(c)* 118.

Mr. Ian MacGregor

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library the full text of the compensation agreement between the Government and Lazard Freres for the release of Mr. Ian MacGregor to become chairman of the National Coal Board.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply of 30 October 1984 at columns *879-80*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong (Refugees)

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the British Refugee Council's report on the closed camps of Hong Kong; and what action he is taking.

Mr. Luce: I have received a copy of the British Refugee Council's report "Behind Barbed Wire". This is being carefully considered. I shall be discussing those recommendations which fall within the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with members of the Asia committee of the British Refugee Council.

Five Continents Peace Initiative

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the five continents peace initiative.

Mr. Luce: As I said in my answer of 27 June to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) we share the conviction of the signatories of the appeal that there must never be another world war. We believe that security between East and West would be better improved by the negotiation of balanced reductions in the weapons of the superpowers than by a freeze. We have therefore unreservedly welcomed the meeting between Mr. Shultz and Mr. Gromyko in January which we hope will lead to agreement on how to carry forward the process of negotiating arms control agreements covering both nuclear and outer space questions.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will be making to the third review conference of the non-proliferation treaty in Geneva in September 1985; and what parliamentary representation he proposes.

Mr. Luce: The non-proliferation treaty is one of the most important arms control agreements. It has contributed substantially to the security of contracting parties. The British delegation to the 1985 review conference will speak strongly in its support.

The level of Ministerial representation at the 1985 review conference has yet to be decided but will be such as to underline our very firm commitment to the NPT.

Falkland Islands

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what fishing controls exist around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Renton: Beyond the three-mile limit there are no special fishing controls. We are actively considering the possibility of establishing an exclusive fisheries limit (EFL) around the Falkland Islands. As the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs recognise in its report, this raises a number of complex issues. No decisions have yet been taken.

Peking (Embassy)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give a breakdown by strength of Department of the number of staff currently based at the embassy in Peking.

Mr. Renton: The establishment of our embassy in Peking broken down by Department is:

Ambassador
Personal assistant

Chancery
Counsellor
Two first secretaries
One second secretary
One second secretary (also employed on information work)
Three secreterial staff
Two locally engaged staff

Commercial Department
Counsellor
First secretary
Second secretary
Attache
Three United Kingdom based support staff
One locally engaged officer.
Commercial work in southern China is covered by the China trade unit in the British Trade Commission in Hong Kong which is staffed by a first and second secretary with 1·5 locally engaged staff.

Economic Section
First secretary

Information Section
See Chancery
One part time locally engaged employee

Consular and Immigration Section
One first secretary
One attache
One United Kingdom-based support staff
4·5 locally engaged staff

Science and Technology
Second secretary

Administration, Communications and General Support
First secretary
Attache
15 United Kingdom-based support staff
39 locally-engaged staff

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase the strength of the commercial section of the Peking embassy.

Mr. Renton: There are no plans to increase the strength of the commercial section of the embassy in Peking. The re-opening of a consulate general in Shanghai in the first half of 1985 will improve our commercial coverage in that important area of China.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those individuals who are currently based with the commercial section of the Peking embassy and state each of their responsibilities.

Mr. Renton: There are eight United Kingdom based officers in the commercial section of the British embassy in Peking.

H. L. Davies, *Counsellor (commercial)*
He supervises the work of the commercial section in Peking and the China trade unit in Hong Kong.

S. J. Towlson, *First secretary (commercial) and deputy to the counsellor (commercial).*
Special responsibility for:
Guangdong Nuclear Project
Steel and non-ferrous metals
Medical
Telecommunications
Scientific instruments
Power generation
Electronics
Banking, invisibles, ECGD
Exhibition policy
Construction, tourism
Patents, copyright, trademark
Commercial law
British Consultants Bureau
Minerals (non-metallic)
Joint ventures

W. D. W. Dennis, *First secretary (economic).*
Special responsibility for:
Economic affairs
Energy (Oil, Coal, Gas)
Energy conservation
Technical co-operation
CBI scholarships
Information technology
UN agencies
World Bank
Commercial section computerisation programme

J. Harrod, *Second secretary (commercial).*
Special responsibility for:
Shanghai consulate
Environmental protection
Roads, railways
Ships, shipping
Chemicals, petrochemicals
Advertising
Publishing
Education

C. Haswell, *Attache (commercial).*
Special responsibility for:
Agriculture
Automotive industry
Mechanical engineering, machine tools
Aerospace
Textiles, textile machinery
Food processing, packaging
Light industry
Exhibitions
Forthcoming events

Miss S. Bennett, *Attache.*
Special responsibility for:
Commercial archives
Projection and exhibition equipment
Export intelligence service notices
Press
Trade statistics

Miss N. James, *Secretarial duties*
Miss L. Franklin, *Secretarial duties*

Messrs. Davies, Dennis, Harrod and Haswell speak Chinese.

In addition the section has clerical support from one locally engaged member of staff.

Embassies

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current strength of the commercial section of each of the United Kingdom's embassies.

Mr. Renton: It is not possible to provide the information requested in the time available. I will write to my hon. Friend.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Waste Material (Dumping at Sea)

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place regarding the dumping at sea of waste material excavated from the site known as the Glory Hole at Eastleigh, Portsmouth; and how his Department ensures that no danger can occur to marine life or the environment.

Mr. MacGregor: My Department received in April 1984 an application to dump at sea material to be excavated from the site known as the Glory Hole at Eastney, Portsmouth. The applicant was informed in July 1984 that a licence would not be granted. At the same time he was asked whether he wished to discuss the matter with officials but this offer has not so far been taken up. In the meantime the city of Portsmouth planning department have indicated that it would wish to be present at any such meeting.

In considering dumping at sea licence applications my Directorate of Fisheries Research provides scientific advice on the likely implications for the marine environment and the living resources it supports.

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's present policy with regard to the dumping of waste material at sea; and what guidelines are published.

Mr. MacGregor: My Department's policy on sea dumping is governed by the requirement of the Dumping at Sea Act 1974, also contained in part II of the Food and Environment Protection Bill now before Parliament, whereby the licensing authority has to have regard to the need to protect the marine environment and its living resources from any adverse consequences of dumping operations. Full account is taken of the provision of, and of the decisions arising from, the Oslo and London dumping conventions and of scientific advice provided by my Directorate of Fisheries Research. Before dumping licences are granted for applications which satisfy these requirements, consideration is given as to whether sea dumping represents the best practicable environmental option for the wastes concerned.

Dumping licences vary considerably and each application has to be considered individually on its merits in the light of the relevant legislation and international considerations. Guidelines are, however, provided by the relevant annexes of the Oslo and London conventions.

Soil Survey

Mr. Lilley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any action is to be taken on recommendation 54 of the Rothschild White Paper, "Framework for Government Research and Development", Cmnd. 4814, November 1971, that a review of the Soil Survey of England and Wales should be held.

Mrs. Fenner: Action was taken and the White Paper "Framework for Government Research and Development" Cmnd. 5046, July 1972, paragraph 56, stated that the Soil Survey of England and Wales would continue to be a research council responsibility, but the funds for its financing would be transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as from 1973-74.

Cereals

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reduction in the price of cereals would be required to eliminate the present surplus in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not possible to estimate accurately the price cut needed to reduce production by any given amount. Producers' planting decisions are affected by other factors such as the profitability of other enterprises and the development of new varieties. This does not however detract from the need for the Community to pursue a sustained policy of price restraint if the cereals market is to be brought into a better balance.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent common agricultural policy prices are linked to changes in the value of the deutschmark against other currencies in the European currency unit currency basket; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* the percentage increase in United Kingdom common agricultural policy prices which would result from, respectively, an increase of 10 per cent. in the value of the deutschmark and a fall of 10 per cent. in sterling, all other things remaining the same.

Mr. MacGregor: For three years from April 1984 the creation of new fixed positive monetary compensatory amounts (MCAs) will be avoided. During this period at each realignment of currencies in the European monetary system (EMS), the coefficient used in calculating MCAs will be adjusted to the extent that the "strongest" currency — that is the currency which revalues most — is revalued. The currency concerned can in principle be any one of the currencies maintained within the narrow margins of fluctation under the EMS and would not therefore necessarily be the Deutschmark.

Adjustment of this coefficient would not directly affect CAP prices but could lead to extra negative MCAs for some member states. Removal of these negative MCAs by green rate devaluations would increase national support prices in the member states concerned but the Commission has undertaken to take account of the need to avoid disturbing the market balance for agricultural products or to aggravate inflation in the countries concerned before proposing any such devaluations. A change in the value of the Deutschmark or of sterling has no affect on CAP support prices in the United Kingdom. Only a change in the level of the representative rate for CAP purposes—the "green pound"—or a change in common prices expressed in European currency units affect support prices.

Rapeseed

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the effect the elimination of the subsidy on crushing domestically-produced rapeseed would have on production of rapeseed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: The effect of the removal of the rapeseed crushing subsidy would be that crushers would not buy Community seed except where world prices were at or above Community levels. The seed not purchased by crushers would be sold into intervention or exported with the aid of export refunds. This should not greatly change the returns to growers. If the whole of the rapeseed support system were removed, but the support systems for other arable crops remained in place, most growers would no doubt opt to switch out of rapeseed production unless world prices were very firm.

Nuclear Winter

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give an estimate of the quantities of seed, fertilisers and fuel which would be required to restore agricultural production following protracted cold and dark caused by the atmospheric effects of a nuclear conflict.

Mrs. Fenner: No meaningful estimate can be given in view of the large number of assumptions required to forecast the possible effects of such conflict.

Dairy Farming

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what number of individuals serving on local panels allocating secondary milk production in Wales have detailed knowledge and experience of dairy farming.

Mr. MacGregor: Ministers have appointed as members of local panels persons of proven judgment and experience from many walks of life. A large proportion of all panel members have a detailed knowledge of farming, particularly dairy farming, and others have been professionally concerned with rural matters. In Wales 22 of the 33 panel members are or have been dairy farmers.

Potato Marketing Board

Sir Philip Holland asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received since June 1983 from potato growers urging him to withdraw financial support fom the Potato Marketing Board; whether he now considers that this body has outlived its usefulness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Although I have received some representations on the subject, the future of the Potato Marketing Board is a matter for producers. Proposed amendments to the potato marketing scheme have been thoroughly debated within the industry and a public inquiry recently considered the views of objectors.

The Government reviewed their role in potato market support earlier this year and concluded that both consumers and producers benefited from the relative stability which a limited managed market framework could provide. While this implied a continuing need for Government funding, the proposals following from that review will limit the commitment to a greater degree in future.

Mineral Waters

Mr. Hirst asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects that the regulations about mineral water to be made under EEC directive 80/777/EEC will be tabled and approved by Parliament.

Mrs. Fenner: We expect to lay before Parliament during January new regulations relating to the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters which implement EC directive 80/777.

Farm Capital Grants

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the value of the cutback imposed on Northern Ireland in the measures announced by the Minister in his recent statement of changes in farm capital grants.

Mr. Jopling: The changes announced on 11 December 1984 apply throughout the United Kingdom and about £13 million of the estimated savings in 1985-86 are expected to arise in Northern Ireland.

Sea Fish Industry Authority (Development Programme)

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is in a position to make a statement about the progress of the European Community's examination of the Sea Fish Industry Authority's development programme in accordance with article 93(2) of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. MacGregor: I am pleased to be able to announce that the European Commission has now given its approval to over three-quarters of the authority's development programme. This means that the authority will now be able to press ahead with its campaign to improve the marketing of fish in the United Kingdom, for which the Government have pledged £7·9 million towards the authority's proposed spending of £14 million over the first three years.

This is very good news indeed. The authority can now start its multi-million pound campaign to get fish increasingly on the menu.

A substantial amount of money will be spent on specific schemes to improve the freshness and quality of fish from the moment it is taken from the sea to the point of sale to the customer. It took both the authority and the Government some time to work out an effective and commercially-oriented programme, and I am delighted that it now has the approval of the Commission.

The first instalment of this Exchequer contribution will be paid next month. Discussion will be resumed early next year on the few remaining items in respect of which the Commission has sought additional information. Our aim will be to bring these to a satisfactory outcome as quickly as possible.

Milk

Mr. William Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which European Economic

Community member states have technical and administrative difficulties concerning the application of the milk supplementary levy.

Mr. MacGregor: The Agriculture Commissioner told the Council on 11 December that, apart from Luxembourg, all the member states where there might be a liability to supplementary levy this month had made the individual quotas known to their producers. The extent to which special cases and other administrative details had been completed varied considerably, but all member states still have some problems to resolve.

Mr. William Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which European Economic Community member states have produced over their milk quota to date or for such periods for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. William Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which European Economic Community member states have adopted a system of milk quotas based on dairies; and of these which have dairies which have to date exceeded that quota.

Mr. MacGregor: The following EC member states have adopted milk quotas according to formula B (ie based on wholesale milk deliveries to purchasers): Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg.

We do not have information about the quotas issued to individual dairies in these member states. However, Denmark and France have both stated that they are within quota for the first half year, though the Commission is challenging the latter. Greece is not liable for levy until the end of 1984-85. Ireland and Luxembourg both appear to be above their quotas for the first half year. In the United Kingdom quotas are applied through Formula B in Great Britain where deliveries are within the purchaser quotas issued.

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the EEC member countries penalised for being believed to have produced more milk than is allowed under the Community quota scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: In making its calculations of funds to be advanced to member states for financing expenditure on the CAP during December, the Commission has made allowances for the revenue estimated to be due under the supplementary levy. This affects the advances to all member states except Denmark, Greece and Italy.

We are fully committed to the milk supplementary levy arrangements agreed by the Agriculture Council in March. It is clear from last week's Council discussion and from the position adopted by other member states that there are differences in the interpretation of the rules and uncertainty about the amount of levy due. We are, therefore, suspending action for the time being. We are keeping the situation under review and are ready to collect and pay over any levies that may be due from us once the legal position becomes clearer and other member states are conforming to the requirements.

EMPLOYMENT

Information Technology Centres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whom he consulted outside of Government, and when, before publishing his recent proposals on the financing of information technology centres; and what was the result of those consultations;

(2) what consultations he had with information technology centres before publishing his recent proposals for their future financing; and what was the result of these consultations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The basis on which the Manpower Services Commission funds information technology centres has not changed, except for the additional funding which the commission is providing until October 1985. Centre sponsors and managers have been aware from the outset that the funding from the Department of Trade and Industry was for pump-priming purposes for a limited period only. I have not therefore carried out the widespread consultations referred to. The announcement I made in my reply to my hon. Friend the member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) on 7 November 1984, at columns, 2-3, should encourage centres to continue their development and thus enhance our efforts to accelerate training in new technology.

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the long-term unemployed, that is those out of work for one year or longer, have no formal qualifications; and what were the comparable figures for 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: Results from the 1983 labour force survey indicate that in the second quarter of 1983 there were 1,213,000 persons in Great Britain aged 16 to 59 without a job who were looking for work in the week before the survey and had been seeking for more than a year. Of these, 726,000 had no educational or vocational qualifications. The corresponding figures from the 1979 survey were 288,000 and 207,000, respectively. There was no labour force survey in 1974.

Young Persons

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Employment what statistical evidence he has that unemployment and wage rates for young people are correlated.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There have been a number of studies in recent years which indicate that the employment prospects of young people have been adversely affected by high levels of earnings relative to adults. These include work within the Department which is summarised in Department of Employment research paper No. 42. A survey of international evidence, published in the OECD "Employment Outlook" of September 1984, reached similar conclusions.

Methyl Isocyanate

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the use in Britain of methyl isocyanate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Methyl isocyanate is used in the factory of Ciba Geigy at Grimsby in the manufacture of Thiazofluron, an active ingredient for herbicides. It was used in 1981 in the manufacture of insecticide at the FBC factory at Hauxton, Cambridgeshire. Since that time no insecticide has been made at the factory and only small quantities have been used for laboratory experiments. Some other premises use small quantities for research purposes.

Job Creation

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he has introduced to improve the creation of jobs in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government are committed to maintaining their economic policies, which are directed at holding down inflation and public borrowing, while encouraging greater enterprise, flexibility and competitiveness in industry and the labour market. This is the best way to secure real, lasting growth in output and jobs in London and elsewhere. We are bringing direct help to large numbers of unemployed people in the area through our special employment and training measures, such as the enterprise allowance scheme which is currently helping almost 4,000 people in London to set up in business, and is to be further extended next year. London will also benefit this year from nearly £57 million of urban programme aid, a substantial proportion of which will be devoted to job creation projects.

Community Programme

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will estimate *(a)* how many married women and *(b)* how many married men will become ineligible for places on the community programme under recent changes;

(2) if he will indicate *(a)* how many married women and *(b)* how many married men who would not now be eligible under recent rule changes have had places on the community programme in the 12 months preceding the change.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 9 November 1984, at columns *27-28*.

British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what research has been commissioned by him or the Manpower Services Commission from the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education in the last five years; which of this research has been published; which remains incomplete; and which has been completed but not published.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In the past five years the Department of Employment has not commissioned any research from the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education. The Manpower Services Commission has commissioned one project of this nature. In December 1982 it was asked to report on the training information system in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to the needs and resources of non-statutory training organisations. The report has been completed, but there are no plans at present to publish it.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on employment trends in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Mr. Alan Clark: The employed labour force in Great Britain increased by 28,000—seasonally adjusted—in the second quarter of 1984. Within this total the number of employees in service industries increased by 36,000 and the number in manufacturing industries increased by 3,000.

Computer Operators (Newcastle)

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of computer operators at present registered as unemployed in the Newcastle on Tyne travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about occupation is not available in the unemployment benefit office records on which the unemployment count is based.

Industrial Training Boards and Skillcentres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many proposals for new courses and projects have been *(a)* made and *(b)* approved in the last two years in respect of skillcentres that have been proposed for closure.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply,* 14 December 1984, c. *631*]: In the skillcentres proposed for closure the skillcentre training agency has introduced in the last two years 27 wholly new adult training classes for the Manpower Services Commission's training division. This is in addition to the normal upgrading of existing provision in line with industrial requirements and technological change. Some 64 tailor-made courses have also been run exclusively for employers. There is no approval system for new courses, which are negotiated on a commercial basis.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what research has been *(a)* commissioned, *(b)* completed and *(c)* published at the instigation of himself or the Manpower Services Commission since 1979 into the role of industrial training boards, including the effectiveness of voluntary arrangements to replace the functions of former statutory industrial training boards; and if he will give a progress report of all such research not yet published and a list of all such research.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply,* 14 December 1984, c. *631*]: In the course of the review of the Employment and Training Act 1973, research was commissioned into aspects of the roles of industrial training boards. Details are contained in the report "Outlook on Training" published by the Manpower Services Commission in July 1980. The Manpower Services Commission subsequently undertook a review of future training arrangements in each sector of the economy which in July 1981 was published in the report "A Framework for the Future".

No further research has been commissioned by this Department or the Manpower Services Commission into the role of industrial training boards or non-statutory training organisations. I understand, however, that officials are preparing an information paper to be put to the commission in the near future, though there are no plans for publication.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the profitability of skillcentres that have been proposed for closure.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *631*]: The expected outturn in 1984-85 for each of the skillcentres proposed for closure is as follows:

	£	
Scotland		
Bellshill Annexe	61,876	Shortfall
Dumbarton	41,856	Shortfall
Edinburgh Annexe	82,379	Surplus
Hillington Annexe	180,407	Shortfall
Queenslie	181,949	Shortfall
Northern England		
Doncaster	311,112	Shortfall
Killingworth	161,400	Shortfall
Middlesbrough	235,257	Shortfall
North West England		
Hindley Annexe	129,133	Shortfall
Liverpool	203,114	Shortfall
Manchester Denton	167,526	Shortfall
Midlands		
Castle Bromwich	122,774	Shortfall
Kirkby in Ashfield	209,188	Shortfall
Long Eaton	455,681	Shortfall
Redditch	214,848	Shortfall
Wolverhampton Annexe	32,120	Surplus
Birmingham Young People's Training Centre	297,367	Shortfall
Wales		
Llanelli	180,101	Shortfall
West Gwent	276,267	Shortfall
South of England (West)		
Bristol Annexe	35,009	Surplus
Gloucester Annexe	101,439	Surplus
Plymouth Annexe	86,848	Shortfall
Southampton Annexe	95,798	Surplus
West Sussex Annexe	18,519	Shortfall
South of England (East)		
Medway Annexe	61,801	Surplus
Twickenham	351,403	Shortfall
Waddon	450,417	Shortfall
Waddon Annexe	174,539	Surplus
Lambeth Youth Training Centre	341,888	Shortfall

For the network as a whole, 15 skillcentres are expected to be in surplus, of a total of 87.

The profitability of skillcentres in 1985-86 and subsequent years will depend on the levels of business obtained and the costs incurred.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Executive (Accountability)

40. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Lord Privy Seal whether he will introduce measures to make the Executive more accountable to the Legislature.

Mr. Biffen: Parliamentary accountability is a continuing factor in the conduct of government.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Servants (Confidential Material)

45. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants have been disciplined in the last two years for breaches of trust in relation to confidential material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on 6 February 1984, it would not be appropriate for me to give details of this kind.

Trade Union Discussions

46. **Mr. Parry** asked the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of trade unions in the Civil Service; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley).

Disabled Persons

Mr. Thurnham asked the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the number of registered disabled people employed in Government Departments in the years 1979 to 1984 expressed as a percentage of the total number of employees in each Department.

Mr. Hayhoe: The numbers of registered disabled people employed by Government Departments are collected once a year, as at 1 June. The numbers of registered disabled people employed by Government Departments in the years 1979 to 1984, expressed as a percentage of the total number of employees in each department, were:

Percentage disabled (as at 1 June)

Department	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	2·45	2·18	2·00	1·77	1·74	1·53
Cabinet Office	1·64	1·33	1·37	1·33	0·96	—
Cabinet Office including MPO	—	—	—	—	—	1·22
Charity Commission	1·52	1·20	0·92	0·93	1·18	1·50
Civil Service Department (and Parliamentary Counsel and CS College)	1·60	1·37	1·29	—	—	—
Civil Service Pay Research Unit	1·72	1·23	1·47	—	—	—
Crown Estate Office	0·85	0·90	0·90	0·90	1·77	—
Crown Office Scotland	0·27	0·37	0·34	0·33	0·32	0·32

Department	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Customs and Excise	1·80	1·65	1·53	1·47	1·37	1·26
Defence, Ministry of	1·43	1·28	1·25	1·26	1·12	1·16
Education and Science	2·22	1·96	2·54	1·69	1·62	2·01
Employment Group	2·67	3·20	3·04	2·73	2·58	2·48
Energy	1·70	1·23	1·06	1·03	0·84	0·79
Environment (including PSA and Transport)	1·73	1·70	1·66	1·59	1·54	1·21
Exchequer Office (Scotland)	3·57	3·70	—	—	—	—
Export Credits Guarantee	1·83	2·06	1·91	1·53	1·37	1·34
Fair Trading, Office of	2·01	1·59	2·58	2·69	0·66	1·22
Foreign and Commonwealth	1·52	1·56	1·44	1·46	1·08	0·62
Friendly Societies, Registry of	4·46	4·26	4·18	3·35	4·42	2·47
General Register Office (Scotland)	3·44	3·91	3·37	2·92	2·80	2·77
Government Actuary's	—	0·82	1·60	1·61	1·69	3·23
Health and Social Security	2·06	1·99	1·97	1·76	1·65	1·50
Home Office	0·73	0·67	0·59	0·57	0·51	0·53
Information, Central Office of	1·78	1·56	1·61	1·40	1·33	1·60
Inland Revenue	1·76	1·78	1·72	1·65	1·60	1·57
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce	0·78	0·93	1·05	1·88	1·71	1·56
Land Registry	2·16	1·96	1·91	1·96	2·13	2·10
Lands Tribunal for Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Law Officers	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lord Advocate's (Scotland)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lord Chancellor's	1·57	1·73	1·74	1·90	1·86	1·57
Management and personnel office	—	—	—	1·55	1·78	*
National Debt Office	6·59	—	—	—	—	—
National Investment and Loans Office	—	4·38	4·76	5·04	5·56	5·66
National Savings	2·65	2·61	2·61	2·62	2·72	2·91
Northern Ireland Office	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ordnance Survey	1·97	1·63	1·55	1·57	1·94	1·41
Overseas Development Administration	1·55	1·29	1·23	1·31	1·72	1·61
Paymaster General's Office	1·85	2·19	1·91	2·40	2·76	2·78
Population, Censuses and Surveys, Office of	2·53	2·11	1·94	2·07	2·25	2·22
Privy Council Office	5·80	5·19	5·71	5·88	6·45	6·25
Public Prosections, Director of	3·54	2·41	2·04	2·03	1·77	1·30
Public Record Office	3·54	3·44	2·04	3·70	3·97	4·00
Public Trustee Office	2·91	3·43	3·27	—	—	—
Registers of Scotland	0·45	0·65	0·75	0·67	1·13	1·59
Royal Mint	2·88	2·19	3·21	3·27	3·44	3·35
Royal ordnance factories	2·39	—	—	—	—	—
Royal Scottish Museum	1·85	1·22	—	—	—	—
Scottish Courts Administration	1·76	1·28	1·13	1·07	0·91	0·57
Scottish Office	1·67	1·79	1·63	1·65	1·32	1·18
Scottish prison service	0·27	0·41	0·40	0·37	0·33	†
Scottish Record Office	2·24	3·16	3·16	0·75	0·78	0·81
Stationery Office	3·07	3·04	3·09	3·04	2·44	2·45
State hospital Carstairs	1·42	0·67	0·63	0·60	0·45	‡
Trade and Industry	1·88	1·84	1·55	1·46	1·32	1·20
Treasury	2·54	2·11	2·07	1·55	1·48	1·42
Treasury Solicitor	2·84	3·50	3·01	2·73	2·46	2·17
Welsh Office	2·64	2·35	2·35	2·32	2·18	1·81

* Included in Cabinet Office.
† Included in Scottish Office.
‡ Now fringe body.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Prescriptions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he had with the Committee on Safety of Medicines before deciding to impose restrictions on certain medicines hitherto prescribed on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. Our limited list will set out the range of drugs available on the National Health Service in the therapeutic categories concerned to meet all clinical needs. Consideration of this matter seems to me to be quite distinct from the work of the committee which, under the Medicines Act 1968 and Community legislation, advises on whether medicines of all kinds should, taking into account safety, efficacy and quality, be authorised for marketing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements he intends to make in respect of patients in general practitioner local hospitals who receive drugs under the hospital formulary which will not be available on prescription under the National Health Service on their discharge, under the minimum list proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Limited list arrangements will apply throughout the National Health Service. Our proposals aim to provide effective low cost medicines to meet all clinical needs in the small number of therapeutic categories affected. If there are differences of significance between these proposals and the 400 or so local hospital formularies in existence we would expect these to be reflected in the comments we receive during the course of consultation.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will outline the current methods of

supervision and scrutiny of the costs of drug prescribing by general practitioners under the National Health Service; and why he considers them to be inadequate.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The present system of prescription monitoring is undertaken by our Department in conjunction with the Prescription Pricing Authority. Prescribers whose costs are above average are visited by our regional medical officers, who also discuss prescribing topics in the course of their regular contacts with general practitioners. While such contacts have proved useful in individual cases the already excessive drugs bill continues to rise and we have concluded that other measures are necessary to constrain it.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will set out in tabular form, for each regional health authority, the cost of drugs prescribed by general practioners for the latest available 12-month period and the number of prescriptions written, indicating whether there are any significant regional variations.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The numbers and net ingredient costs of prescriptions dispensed by chemists and appliance contractors in each of the regional health authorities in the 12-month period ending 31 August 1984 are as follows:

Regional health authority	*Number of prescriptions*	*Total net ingredient cost (£s)*
Northern	23,175,424	88,038,414
Yorkshire	25,360,162	89,406,379
Trent	30,864,985	108,395,297
East Anglian	9,576,898	37,008,129
North West Thames	22,857,937	83,153,710
North East Thames	25,222,285	86,596,194
South East Thames	24,436,046	87,711,432
South West Thames	18,708,129	69,684,187
Wessex	17,698,564	67,198,886
Oxford	13,014,177	50,180,234
South Western	20,383,769	74,527,658
West Midlands	36,679,522	127,942,745
Mersey	19,497,195	65,562,944
North Western	33,581,582	114,889,909

Many factors including demographic differences and morbidity patterns contribute to regional variations but we are not able to quantify the effect of any one particular factor.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will list the drugs available for prescription under the hospital formulary which will not also be available under limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Hospital formularies are drawn up on an individual hospital or health authority basis. There are some 400 in existence and the drugs they cover at the moment will not necessarily be the same as the final list of drugs to remain available on the National Health Service in each of the groups covered by our limited list proposals. We will not finally decide which drugs will no longer be prescribable at public expense through the National Health Service until after our consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions and the drugs industry is complete.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he intends to make to compensate companies for losses in sales occasioned by their products being excluded from National Health Service availability under his limited list proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I do not believe that a customer would ordinarily compensate a vendor if the customer decided to buy alternative products.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement as to the effectiveness hitherto of the guidance issued to doctors in his Department's cost charts on the costs of prescribable medicines in containing expenditure regarding those groups of medicines to be included in his proposals for limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Doctors find our cost comparison charts useful in pointing to the wide variations in costs between similar drugs. So many factors influence prescribing that it is not possible to isolate the impact of the charts in particular therapeutic categories, though there can be no doubt that they have one.

Oglesby Report

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how far he has now implemented the recommendations of the Oglesby report; and whether any administrative savings have resulted.

Mr. Newton: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the Oglesby report on mobility allowance and attendance allowance procedures and medical adjudication. So far we have implemented 14 of the report's recommendations, all of which should improve the quality of service to the public. It is not possible to estimate the extent to which they may have produced administrative savings. The average time taken between claim and receipt of first payment has reduced since March 1983 from 16 to 10 weeks for mobility allowance and from 12·5 to 10 weeks for attendance allowance.

Roche Products Ltd.

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from Roche Products Ltd. concerning his proposals for limited list prescribing; what response he is making; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our officials have already met representatives of the company. We cannot give a final response to their representations until we have completed our consultations. We will consider arguments they put forward about the completeness of the provisional list of drugs with care.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Cabora asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department is taking to encourage those people so entitled to claim supplementary benefit.

Mr. Whitney: We continue to seek to promote take-up by issuing a claim form to all retirement pensioners and widows, all unemployed claimants and all sickness benefit claimants, and by co-operating as fully as possible at local level with well-organised take-up campaigns mounted by local authorities. We have also introduced a free phone information and advice service throughout the whole country except at present London postal districts.

Pensioners

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of pensioners with gross incomes *(a)* over £20,000, *(b)* between £10,000 and £20,000, *(c)* between £5,000 and £10,000 and *(d)* receiving supplementary benefit; and if he will break down each figure into the following categories: (i) lone pensioners, (ii) married couples and (iii) any other types of family unit.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Still Births

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of still births in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: The table gives the information in respect of England and Wales.

Year	*Number*
1974	7,175
1975	6,295
1976	5,709
1977	5,405
1978	5,108
1979	5,125
1980	4,773
1981	4,207
1982	3,939
1983	3,631

Funerals (Payments)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will estimate the number of supplementary benefit claimants who claimed a single payment for help towards the cost of a funeral in each of the past 10 years; and whether he will calculate the total costs of such payments;

(2) whether he will estimate the average of single payments made to supplementary benefit claimants for help towards funeral costs in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Whitney: Figures on supplementary benefit single payments for funeral expenses are not yet available for 1983, nor are any available for years before 1981. The table shows the approximate number, total amount paid and average amount of such awards recorded in the annual statistical inquiries of December 1981 and December 1982 respectively. Because these figures relate to payments made during the 12 months preceding each enquiry to claimants still in receipt of supplementary benefit at the time of the inquiry, they are an under-estimate of the total number and overall cost of such payments made during the year. Figures are not available on the number of people who claimed such payments (as opposed to the number of payments actually made).

Date of annual statistical inquiry	*Number of payments*	*Average amount*	*Total amount paid*
		(£)	*(£ million)*
December 1981	11,000	165	1·8
December 1982	12,500	210	2·6

NHS (Treatment Statistics)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* females over 60 years of age and *(b)* males over 65 years of age received treatment under the National Health Service in 1982-83.

Mr. John Patten: Information on age is available for National Health Service inpatients only. In 1982, the latest year for which this information is available, there were an estimated 694,700 male inpatient cases aged 65 and over and 993,900 female inpatient cases aged 60 and over.

Heart Operations (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service patients from the north-west have so far been taken to London hospitals for heart operations in 1984; how many were referred by consultants in south Manchester; and what the total cost has been.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally. The right hon. Member may wish to approach the chairman of the North-West regional health authority for the information he seeks.

Disabled Persons (Hospital Treatment)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration his Department has given to the findings of the report of the nursing studies research unit at Edinburgh university on the problems faced by disabled people entering hospital; what action he is taking with regard to each of the report's recommendations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am not aware that the report has been made available to nursing interests in England but I understand that the authors are preparing papers for wider circulation. In the meantime I understand that the report is being studied by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Hip Replacement Operation

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the minimum, maximum and average length of waiting time for a hip replacement operation in each regional health authority; and how many people on these waiting lists died before their operation in each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: Information on minimum and maximum waiting times for inpatient treatment is not available from the sample date held centrally. The estimated median interval between the date a patient was placed on the waiting list and the date of admission to an NHS hospital in each of the 14 regional health authorities for the latest three years for which information is available centrally is given in the table. Information on deaths occurring to people while they are on a hospital waiting list is not available centrally.

Estimated median waiting time (in weeks) for operations for total hip replacement and other arthroplasty of hip in NHS hospitals

Regional health authority	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
Northern	17	21	24
Yorkshire	26	17	19
Trent	40	34	30

Regional health authority	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
East Anglian	37	39	29
North West Thames†	20	14	14
North East Thames†	16	17	21
South East Thames†	25	30	23
South West Thames†	18	16	20
Wessex	38	33	*31
Oxford	20	23	19
South Western	36	29	31
West Midlands	34	21	19
Mersey	16	20	12
North Western	25	18	30
Special Health Authorities (SHA) and Boards of Governors (BG)†	19	16	†na
England	25	22	23

* Estimates relate to first six months of 1982 only.

† 1982 figures for the four Thames regions and SHAs/BGs are not strictly comparable with earlier figures because of NHS re-organisation. In particular, the Royal National orthopaedic hospital, formerly managed by a board of governors, came under the administration of North East Thames Regional health authority in April 1982. The central sample information relating to BGs/SHAs is now too small for reliable estimates to be made of such operations in 1982.

Hospitals (Hygiene and Nutrition)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures are being taken to improve hygiene standards in hospitals and residential establishments; and what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government for improving nutritional standards in hospitals.

Mr. John Patten: We have no reason to believe that the general standards of hygiene are unsatisfactory. We expect nutritious food to be provided for patients and the Department has given health authorities advice on this.

Marginal Tax Rates

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide the latest figures, derived from the family expenditure survey, of the numbers of *(a)* working families with children and *(b)* working persons without children with an effective marginal tax rate of (i) 60 per cent. or more, (ii) 70 per cent. or more and (iii) 100 per cent. or more; in each case what percentage of all working families and persons these figures represent; and if he will give an estimate of the current position.

Mr. Whitney: I regret the exact information requested is not available. The family expenditure survey data have been analysed to give estimates of working families with various ranges of marginal tax rates but not precisely those requested. The latest estimates derived wholly from these data relate to 1981. Further tentative estimates have been made of the current position. The available information is shown in the table:

*Estimated number of working families with marginal tax rates of 50 per cent. or more**

Marginal tax rate (per cent.)	*1981*		*†Current position*	
	Number	*Percentage of appropriate group of working families*	*Number*	*Percentage of appropriate group of working families*
Families with children				
50 or more	260,000	about 4½	300,000	about 5
75 or more	60,000	about 1	210,000	about 3½
100 and over	10,000	about ½	not known	not known
Families without children				
50 and over‡	70,000	about ¾	60,000	about ½

* Excludes families subject to higher rates of income tax.

† These estimates do not take account of the numbers taken out of tax as a result of the April 1984 Budget. It is estimated that up to 20,000 families with marginal tax rates of 50 per cent. or over will have been affected in this way.

‡ The sample numbers are too small to allow further analysis.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of all those in receipt of standard housing benefit with an income *(a)* above the needs allowance and *(b)* below the needs allowance have children; and, in each case, what percentage of those below pension age have children.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

School Children (Dietary Survey)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish the results of the dietary survey of school children referred to by the Prime Minister on 21 February, *Official Report*, column 457; and whether his Department is undertaking or commissioning any other research relating to nutritional intake.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that preliminary findings from the dietary survey of schoolchildren are expected to be available in spring 1985. Nutritional surveys of particular groups within the population are undertaken from time to time, and I expect the Department to continue to commission these as the need arises.

Departmental Staff (Medical Qualifications)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many civil servants in his Department are medically qualified; and how many of them have practical experience of working as general practitioners within the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 1 November 1984 there were 312 medically qualified civil servants working in medical posts in our Department. We estimate that about 50 of these will have worked as general practitioners within the last five years. This includes all those appointed within that time to the regional medical service and the

majority of those appointed to the division dealing with the medical aspects of social security. Doctors going to other posts only occasionally come directly from general practice, although a number have been recruited direct from posts in hospital practice.

Single Payments Regulations (Washing Machines)

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why washing machines are not classed as items for reimbursement under regulation 9*(a)*(i) of the Single Payment Regulations (S.I., 1981, No. 1528); if he will consider so including them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: A single payment of supplementary benefit for a washing machine may be made under regulation 9 (i) of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1981 to a claimant who would have been entitled to a weekly addition to benefit for laundry costs but for the fact that there is no laundry or launderette in the area which the claimant's family can reasonably be expected to use; or, if there is one, the claimant or his partner cannot use it because of illness, disability or lack of public transport.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of retirement pensioners have occupational pensions.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available figures taken from the 1982 family expenditure survey showed that 60 per cent. of men aged 65 and over and 21 per cent. of women aged 60 and over had occupational pensions. Overall, 35 per cent. of people over state retirement age were then in receipt of occupational pensions.

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information about individual occupational pension schemes is held by the Occupational Pensions Board.

Mr. Whitney: The Occupational Pensions Board maintains joint files with the superannuation funds office of the Inland Revenue. However the board's primary concern is with occupational pension schemes which are contracted-out from the state earnings-related pension scheme. Although these cover about 90 per cent. of scheme members, they account for only about 15 per cent. of all current schemes.

When a scheme first seeks approval under the Finance Acts or applies for contracted-out status, it is required to submit a copy of its deeds and rules. Contracted-out schemes are also required to submit, for the Occupational Pensions Board's approval, any proposed amendment to their deeds and rules which might affect their contracted-out status; and they must also supply regular actuarial certificates confirming the continuing solvency of the scheme with respect to its contracted-out liabilities.

Self-administered schemes which are contracted-out must provide the board with an annual statement confirming that the accounts are complete and have been audited, that contributions have been paid in accordance with the scheme actuary's recommendations, and that the actuary is aware of any substantial changes relevant to his current certificate. The statement must also indicate the extent of any self-investment or concentration of investment of scheme assets.

In the case of insured schemes which are contracted-out, the board requires an annual statement from the life office concerned confirming that premiums have been paid as required by the scheme actuary and that the membership details held by the life office are up to date. Contracted-out schemes are also required to notify the Occupational Pensions Board of any changes to the scheme name, employer's name, or the participating employers. They must also tell the board if the scheme is wound up.

There are no other requirements on schemes to keep the information held by the Occupational Pensions Board up to date or to submit annual reports or other information. Some information is submitted voluntarily by schemes seeking advice on whether they are complying with the statutory requirements for preservation of benefits for early leavers and equal access to schemes for men and women.

Pensions

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the average gross pension, retirement pension and second pension, being awarded to people retiring now.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available information on state retirement pension shows that in the six months to September 1983 the average new award was £27·60; this average includes pensions payable to people overseas, small payments of graduated retirement benefit and retirement pensions for wonen awarded on the basis of either their own or their husband's national insurance contributions. The average amount of new awards of occupational pensions is estimated at approximately £35 a week. This estimate is derived from the Government Actuary's 1983 survey of occupational pension schemes and includes occupational pensions in payment to people under state pension age.

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of retirement pensioners; and what is the total number of pensioner family units.

Mr. Whitney: At September 1983, the latest date for which information is available, there were 9,192,000 people receiving a retirement pension in Great Britain, including people who receive only small amounts of pension by way of graduated retirement benefit. Estimates derived from family expenditure survey data indicate that in 1982 there were some 6,290,000 family units in Great Britain headed by a retirement pensioner.

Midwifery Services

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many whole-time equivalent vacancies there are for staff midwives, midwifery sisters and senior nurses in midwifery.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information of this nature centrally.

Perinatal Inquiry Committees

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which maternity liaison committees have set up confidential perinatal inquiry committees to collect information and collate reports.

Mr. John Patten: The most recent information on the extent of perinatal confidential inquiries is that given in 1983 to the Social Services Committee and published as part of appendix 1 of the Committee's third report, session 1983-84. We shall be calling for reports in due course on the action taken by health authorities in implementing the Reports of the maternity services advisory committee, which recommended both the establishment of maternity service liaison committees, and that such committees should encourage perinatal confidential inquiries to be set up.

Advisory Committee on Medical Manpower Planning

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to publish the report of the advisory committee on medical manpower planning.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We hope to publish the report in the near future.

Kidneys and Smoking-related Diseases (Member's Questions)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why, pursuant to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *127*, he has not yet given a substantial reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East relating to smoking-related diseases and kidney transplants; when he expects to make a substantive reply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I replied to the hon. Member on 22 November at column *241* and on 14 December at column *665*.

Aspartame

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is currently considering Professor Richard Wurtman's tests on the sweetener aspartame.

Mr. John Patten: The independent expert advisory committee on the toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment last considered data relating to Dr. Wurtman's studies in 1983. The Department's medical staff continue to monitor information on aspartame, and would seek the committee's advice if significant new information about its effects was produced.

Portable Cordless Telephones

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department will seek to obtain details of the findings of recent research done in the United States of America into the effects on hearing of portable cordless telephones.

Mr. Newton: I have put the necessary inquiries in hand.

Mrs. Anne Wood

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why Mrs. Anne Wood of 37 Netheridge avenue, Lichfield, Staffordshire, has not received the child benefit due to her since 20 June; why the child benefit office in Washington new town has disregarded her written instruction to pay the sum due to her into either her bank or building society accounts; and if he will ensure that this matter is resolved before Christmas.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that some confusion, resulting in part from industrial action, led to Mrs. Wood's child benefit claim being delayed. The problems have been resolved and she should receive her arrears within a few days.

Invalid Three-wheeler Cars

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide the latest available data as to the number of petrol-driven three-wheelers for the disabled licensed for road use, and the number of those in reserve stock.

Mr. Newton: On 1 December 1984 the United Kingdom Health Departments' fleet of petrol-driven invalid three-wheelers consisted of 7,454 licensed vehicles on issue to disabled people, 1,426 licensed vehicles in reserve, and 2,013 unlicensed vehicles in store. The Departments also have some invalid three-wheelers powered by electricity. Two hundred and thiry five are on issue, 40 are in reserve, and 301 are in store.

Child Benefit

Mr. Higgins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the maximum delay in a person entitled to child benefit asking for it to be paid direct into a bank account and the necessary arrangements for this to be done to be made.

Mr. Whitney: Payment of child benefit by credit transfer is made every four weeks in arrears. The arrangments for a straightforward new claim are such that the first credit should be available within six weeks of a claim being received. When an existing beneficiary asks to change to credit transfer, the change will usually take place after her current order book has expired. A child benefit order book normally covers a 20 week period. Recently there have been delays due to industrial action at Washington child benefit centre.

Supplementary Benefit (Leaflet S.10)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that leaflet S.10 concerning information for claimants about changes in supplementary benefit for couples was correctly drafted.

Mr. Whitney: One inaccuracy in this leaflet was noted by the Department subsequent to its publication. At line 13 on page 2 it was not made clear that one of the conditions for being the claimant when a claim is received on behalf of a couple is receipt of supplementary benefit to care for a relative or a severely disabled person for 6 months before the claim. This leaflet is no longer issued to claimants, but if the hon. Member is aware of any difficulties which it has caused, I would be grateful if he would let me know.

Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984

Mrs. Jill Knight asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps his Department is taking to monitor compliance with the regulations laid down in the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984; and to whom complaints about alleged breaches of the regulations should be made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I see no reason to make special arrangements to monitor compliance with these regulations.

Complaints about breaches of any of the prescribed conditions of the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984 can be laid on written information before a magistrate. Breaches of the regulations will be a criminal offence under the Opticians Act 1958 and could result in a fine of £1,000. In addition, failure to observe the conditions would be a breach of contract between the consumer and retailer and open to redress through the courts.

Mrs. Jill Knight asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will include in publicity material issued by his Department in connection with the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984 a reminder that it remains illegal to provide reading glasses without a prescription from a qualified opthalmic optician or ophthalmic medical practitioner.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The guide published by our Department is quite clear on what is permitted and what is not.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Visit)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what reasons the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abington (Mr. Patten) visited the Woolworth store in Edgware road, Westminister, on Monday 10 December.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Sale of Optical Appliances Order of Council 1984 came into effect on 10 December to permit the sale of spectacles by unregistered suppliers. This marked an important day for the Government's policy of encouraging competition in the interests of consumers and my hon. Friend called to see for himself some examples of the wider range of low-priced spectacles already on the market.

SCOTLAND

Health Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the most recent figures for the distribution of health expenditure for each Scottish region expressed in per capita terms and categorised according to *(a)* hospital services expenditure, *(b)* community health and family practitioners' services expenditure and *(c)* total expenditure.

Mr. John MacKay: The figures for 1983-84 are as follows:

£ per capita

Health Boards	*Hospital Services*	*Community Health and Family Practitioner services*	*Administration and Related services*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	168·37	81·96	12·83	263·16
Ayrshire and Arran	142·46	81·13	10·79	234·38
Borders	148·87	84·93	13·36	247·16
Dumfries and Galloway	186·84	83·48	13·01	283·33
Fife	144·02	75·74	10·71	230·47
Forth Valley	179·72	80·42	10·49	270·63
Grampian	188·99	75·43	14·16	278·58
Greater Glasgow	305·46	84·60	14·53	404·59
Highland	190·88	91·75	17·44	300·07
Lanarkshire	151·32	78·47	7·79	237·58
Lothian	238·11	80·89	13·71	332·71
Orkney	125·47	105·93	14·24	245·64
Shetland	121·43	97·89	17·10	236·42
Tayside	271·24	81·22	16·48	368·94
Western Isles	144·07	101·53	20·46	266·06

Notes:

1. The expenditure figures used are taken from the annual accounts submitted to the Department by health boards, and are net of charges retained by family practitioners.
2. The population figures used are the mid-year estimates of resident population for 1983.
3. The column headed "Administration and Related Services" shows expenditure on health boards headquarters, on area nurse training, on local health councils and other items not in the category of patient services.
4. The figures do not include expenditure on support services provided by the Common Services Agency which was £10·63 per capita in Scotland as a whole; or expenditure on the main capital programme, which was £12·38 per capita.

The distribution of funds to health boards in Scotland is determined by population weighted according to age, sex and local mortality rates, by the amount of health care provided for patients from neighbouring areas—cross-border flow—by teaching hospital costs, by a number of other commitments, and also by the extent to which individual boards benefit by the operation of the resources equalisation process. It is therefore not possible to draw reliable conclusions from comparisons of per capita expenditure by health board based on resident population figures which make no allowances for these factors.

Broad-leaved Trees

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce measures to ensure that as a general

principle where broad-leaved trees are felled grant aid should only be available for re-stocking with broad-leaved trees.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission already has a general presumption in favour of broad-leaved woodland normally being re-stocked with broad-leaved species.

Disabled Persons (Hospital Treatment)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration his Department has given to the findings of the report of the nursing studies research unit at Edinburgh university on the problems faced by disabled people entering hospital; what action he is taking with regard to each of the report's recommendations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The Scottish Home and Health Department is at present studying this comprehensive report, and considering what action it should take with regard to the proposals for improvements made in it. It line with normal practice, the nursing research unit has made arrangements for the report to be made available to nursing interests generally. In particular, copies have been sent to the chief administrative nursing officers of all health boards. The authors are also preparing further papers on their work for wider publication in relevant professional journals.

Selective Financial Assistance

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications for selective financial assistance he has received in *(a)* the month up to 28 November and *(b)* the year up to 28 November; and if he will take steps to ensure that all applications will be processed by the end of March 1985.

Mr. Allan Stewart: One hundred and thirty five applications for selective financial assistance for projects in Scotland were received in the month up to 28 November 1984 and 443 in the year to 28 November 1984. Arrangements have been made to have all applications received before 29 November 1984 processed by 29 March 1985.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he has paid out in selective financial assistance to companies in the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy travel-to-work areas from 1979 onwards; and how many companies have received help.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Age Concern

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase the amount of financial aid given to the organisation Age Concern Scotland in the next financial year.

Mr. John MacKay: Age Concern Scotland has not yet submitted any application for grant assistance by my right hon. Friend for 1985-86. Once an application is made, the amount of grant to be provided will be assessed in the context of the total resources available.

Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what amounts of grant have been awarded to the Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 in the present year and in each of the past three years.

Mr. John MacKay: The amount of grant paid in the past three years has been as follows:

	£
1981-82	114,649
1982-83	122,928
1983-84	139,319

The grant offered for the current financial year is £150,000.

Police Houses

Mr. Fairbairn asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police houses there are in each of the regions of Scotland; and how many have been sold and how many are held vacant in each region.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 December 1984, c. *507*]: The latest available information, which is for the period up to the end of 1983 and is in respect of police authority areas, is set out as follows:

Police Authority	*Numbers of police houses*	*Numbers vacant*	*Numbers sold (since 1 April 1981)*
Central	130	40	18
Dumfries and Galloway	120	13	8
Fife	206	24	68
Grampian	338	35	*Nil
Lothian and Borders	340	70	181
Northern	341	56	21
Strathclyde	1,276	167	663
Tayside	336	148	41

* Surplus police houses are leased to district councils.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details, by police force area, of the total numbers of arrests to the latest available date in connection with the coal strike, and indicate the number of arrests by offence charged with, the sentences on conviction and the numbers still awaiting trial.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 November 1984, c. *20*]: The latest information available centrally about *(a)* the number of arrests in each Scottish police force area in connection with the dispute in the mining industry, *(b)* the sentences on conviction, and *(c)* the numbers awaiting trial is as follows. Information on the offences in respect of which charges have been brought by procurators fiscal is contained in the reply which my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General for Scotland gave to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 4 December at column *102*.

(a) Arrests (to 7 December)

Police Force Area	*Number of arrests*
Central Scotland	38
Dumfries and Galloway	3
Fife	217
Grampian	Nil
Lothian and Borders	432
Northern	Nil
Strathclyde	703
Tayside	13
	1,406

(b) Sentences on conviction (to 16 November)

Police Force Area	*Imprisonment*	*Fined*	*Admonished*	*Compensation order*	*Community Service order*	*Total*
Dumfries and Galloway	—	2	—	2	—	4
Fife	—	12	4	—	—	16
Lothian and Borders	2	61	3	—	1	67
Strathclyde	—	107	11	—	—	118
Tayside	—	13	4	2	—	19
	2	195	22	4	1	224

Note: These figures relate to sentences: individual persons may have received more than one sentence.

(c) Awaiting trial

As at 28 November, 583 persons were awaiting trial. This figure relates only to those persons who have tendered a plea of not guilty and for whom a diet of trial has been fixed. There are a number of other outstanding cases where the accused is on petition but a decision on whether or not to proceed with the case has still to be taken and no trial diet has therefore been fixed. There are also other outstanding summary proceedings where the accused has not yet appeared in court to answer a complaint or where proceedings have been continued without plea.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Free School Meals

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schoolchildren now receive free school meals in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: 91,293 in October 1983—the latest date for which statistical information is available.

Primary Schools

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent per pupil at primary schools in Northern Ireland in real terms in 1978 and in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: The average current expenditure from public funds at 1983-84 prices is estimated at £559 in the financial year 1978-79 and £622 in 1983-84.

Housing

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many houses were built or completed in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector in Northern Ireland in each year since 1954; and what is the estimate for 1985;

(2) if he will list the various housing subsidies and grants payable for the building, improvement and repair of dwellings in Northern Ireland since 1954, the periods in which they were payable and the maximum amounts in each case up to the recent most convenient date.

Mr. Chris Patten: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mentally Handicapped Persons

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what consideration his Department has given to transferring responsibility for the schooling of mentally handicapped children from the health and social services authorities to the education authorities in Northern Ireland; and what conclusions he has reached;

(2) if he will bring forward legislation to give mentally handicapped children in Northern Ireland a legal right to education.

Mr. Hurd: Following public consultation on the issue and after careful consideration of the many views expressed, the Government have decided that responsibility for the education of these children should be transferred to the education service. The Government take the view that it is in the interests of the children concerned for their educational needs to be met through the statutory system of education as it applies to all other children rather than, as at present, through health and social services boards. To give effect to this decision, new legislation will be required and I shall be making the necessary arrangements to bring appropriate proposals before the House in due course.

The transfer of responsibility which this decision will entail will create new demands on the education sector and will also have practical consequences for health and social services boards in terms of service provision and facilities particularly in respect of mentally handicapped adults. The aim will be to make the best possible use of existing resources, but additional funding will also be made available in the light of the different demands facing education and library boards and health and social services boards in consequence of the Government's decision.

A period of detailed planning will be necessary and education and library boards will now be asked to take this

forward in conjunction with the health and social services boards and the Departments concerned. This will take some time as will the preparation of the necessary amending legislation. Nevertheless, our aim is to have legislation approved by the end of 1986 and to effect the transfer in the spring of 1987. The legislation proposals will include provision for the protection of staff affected by the decision and their relevant staff organisations will be fully consulted.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement outlining the nature and extent of current provision for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland, what the Government's aims and objectives are in making such provision and whether he is satisfied that this provision will meet those objectives;

(2) if he will improve the provision of resources for adult training centres and social education centres for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland;

(3) if he will make a statement on the provision of sheltered employment for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland;

(4) if he will make a statement on the Government's attitude to and role in the dispute in the Western board area arising from the sole deployment of young help workers as day centre bus assistants and the ICTU directive; and if he will suggest to the board that it employs full staff members to assist those using the buses or redeploy care assistants on short hours to do this work with the support of young help workers;

(5) whether the Government feel it is acceptable or proper for areas of work to be undertaken solely by persons on the young help scheme rather than by permanent staff with the assistance of young helpers.

Mr. Chris Patten: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Gas Supplies (Republic of Ireland)

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what costs have been incurred to date as a result of the plans, now discarded by Her Majesty's Government, to bring gas to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Incident (Linden Street)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if any police disciplinary action has been taken against any officers who took part in the Royal Ulster Constabulary Land Rover patrol in the vicinity of Linden street, Belfast, on 9 July 1981.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: Following consideration of the incident by the Royal Ulster Constabulary's complaints and discipline branch the deputy chief constable decided that disciplinary charges should not be brought against any of the police officers involved. A report was made to the independent Police Complaints Board which concurred with his decision.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many formal complaints have been made about incidents of police use of plastic baton rounds in each year since 1979; in how many cases the complaint has been upheld; and in how many cases disciplinary action has been taken against the officers involved.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: The information is as follows:

Complaints against police use of plastic baton rounds

Year	*Complaints Received*	*Complaints Upheld*	*Disciplinary Action Taken*
1979	None	None	None
1980	6	None	None
1981	60	*1	1
1982	6	None	None
1983	5	None	None
†1984	7	None	None

* The investigation of one case is in abeyance pending the result of litigation being pursued by the complainant.
† To 30 November 1984.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been injured by the use of plastic baton rounds in the Province to the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *349*]: Since 17 March 1981, when records where first collated, 247 people are recorded as having been injured by plastic baton rounds. Police investigations of a further 50 cases where baton round injuries were alleged, have established that the injuries were not caused by this means.

Public Authority Housing (Demolition)

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the public authority housing built in Northern Ireland since 1960 which has been demolished or is scheduled for demolition and estimate the value by district council area.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have been informed by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that the available information is as follows:

Dwellings demolished or scheduled for demolition

District Council area and estate	*Number of dwellings*
(i) Belfast	
Turf Lodge	294
Moyard	204
Divis	259
Blackmountain	210
Lower Shankill	283
Glencairn	26
Ballysillan Park	180
(ii) Ballymena	
Doury Road	19
(iii) Newtownabbey	
Derryhill	27
Portrosse Park	8
Abbeytown Square	5
(iv) Derry	
Creggan (Rossin Gardens)	8

District Council area and estate	Number of dwellings
Carranbane	54
Meenan Square	16
(v) Armagh	
Drumarg	6
(vi) Newry and Mourne	
Derrybeg	6
St. Brigid's Park, Culloville	2
(vii) Craigavon	
Drumbeg North	4
Moylinn	1
Churchill Park	35
Legahorry Green	49
Old Rectory, Portadown	2
Ennis Close, Lurgan	81
Rosmoyle, Craigavon	46

It is not possible to value these properties on a common basis; many had no market value before demolition and in some instances demolition was required to improve the amenity of adjacent properties.

Newry-Dundalk (Port Improvement)

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate, in relation to the two options to improve the route between Newry and Dundalk, the mileage in each case which lies within Northern Ireland and within the Irish Republic, and the estimated cost of each option.

Mr. Chris Patten: The two main options considered in the Newry-Dundalk road study report are:

1. Construction of a new route through Glendooey.
2. Improvement to the existing road through Ravensdale forest.

The first option has two variants and the second option three variants, reflecting differences in extent and standards of work involved. Distances and costs of each are as follows:

Variant	Total distance	Northern Ireland distance	Republic of Ireland distance	Total cost £ million
1a	8·43	6·20	2·23	7·6
1b	8·43	6·20	2·23	8·8
2a	1·86	—	1·86	1·1
2b	7·81	—	7·81	4·1
2c	9·36	1·55	7·81	10·3

Young Help Scheme

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the use of the young help scheme by health and social services boards in Northern Ireland outlining all regulations and guidelines relevant to the boards' use of the scheme.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested cannot be provided in the time available. I will write to the hon. Gentleman about the matters raised.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing the numbers working for each health and social service board in Northern Ireland under the young help scheme, the work they do and what permanent staff they are working with.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Cigarettes

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of minutes which need to be worked in order to purchase 20 cigarettes in each EEC country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sterling Balances

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards official sterling balances.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

2p and 5p Coins

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing the real value of today's 5p and 2p pieces in 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960 and 1970; and which coins at the relevant dates would have come nearest to representing these values.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let my right hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Penny Coin

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what savings would be obtained by abolishing the penny.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let my right hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Tax Allowances and Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in real terms in *(a)* tax allowances since the temporary 1979-80 rates introduced by the Finance Act 1979 and *(b)* child benefit since April 1979, specifying in each case any assumptions used.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

European Economic Community (Budget)

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what way the Fontainebleau own resources formula and United Kingdom rebate for 1984 are linked to an agreement by the United Kingdom Parliament to a reimburseable loan for the 1984 European Economic Community Budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Fontainebleau own resources formula and the United Kingdom rebate for 1984 were not made conditional on the United Kingdom Parliament's agreement to supplementary finance for the 1984 EEC Budget.

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent United Kingdom agreement to a reimburseable loan extending 1984 Community expenditure will lead to an increase in United Kingdom net contributions for 1984 and in total.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The United Kingdom's gross contribution to Community institutions in 1984-85 will be increased by £119 million. This advance will be substantially offset by agricultural receipts.

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, and how, the reimburseable loan to the European Economic Community is to be paid and repaid.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The United Kingdom's proposed advance to the Community under the inter-Governmental agreement will not be paid before there is Parliamentary authority for that. The Commission has undertaken to make proposals in due course for reimbursement.

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his powers to make payment to the European Economic Community of a reimbursable loan for commitments in excess of the 1 per cent. value added tax ceiling.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No payment of the United Kingdom's proposed advance to the Community under the inter-Governmental agreement of 2-3 October will be made without Parliament's authority.

Lump Sum Retirement Payments (Taxation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax yield from taxing lump sum payments on retirement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Single Parent Families

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have any proposals to enable working women who are single parents to recover income tax relief in respect of necessary payments by them to child minders and nannies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Nationalised Industries (Shares)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the study he conducted on the free distribution of shares in nationalised industries.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Jack Lacey

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government were *(a)* aware of, *(b)* consulted about and *(c)* agreed to the visit made by Mr. Jack Lacey, who claimed to be from United States customs, to Plasma Technology in Avon on 16 July.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Caravan Sites (Taxation)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue has turned down any applications from owners of touring caravan pitches and third party static caravan pitches to be taxed under schedule D clause 1 since the implementation of the Finance Act 1984.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

National Insurance Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been charged income tax on their national insurance pensions before the pension has been paid because of the industrial action in the Department of Health and Social Security.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let my right hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Galley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information about individual occupational pension schemes is held by the Superannuation Funds Office.

Mr. John Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Alcoholic Beverages (Taxation)

Mr. George Gardiner asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue effect per penny of reducing total tax charges, excise duty plus value added tax on beer, spirits and low, medium and high strength wines, respectively, expressed in £ million at 1985-86 prices.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Oil Taxation

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average percentage tax take per barrel of oil in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Norway.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

M1 Motorway

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to extend the southern sections of the M1 motorway to four lanes.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no schemes in the Government's current trunk road programme for further widening of the southern sections of the M1.

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents per mile there have been on the M1 motorway in each of the last four years; and how this compares with other motorways and with major trunk roads.

Mrs. Chalker: Comparison of accident rates on different roads and different types of road is most

meaningfully done by looking at accidents per vehicle mile. On that basis the information sought is, for England, as follows:

		Accidents per million vehicle miles
M1	1979	0·28
	1980	0·28
	1981	0·28
	1982	0·28
	1983	0·26
All motorways	1980-82	0·23
All trunk roads	1980-82	0·60

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been on the M1 motorway in each of the last five years; how many fatalities have resulted and how many people have been injured; and in which county these accidents have occurred.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

		Bedfordshire	Buckinghamshire	Derbyshire	Greater London	Hertfordshire	Leicestershire	Northamptonshire	Nottinghamshire	South Yorkshire	West Yorkshire	Total
1979	Accidents	105	52	91	86	127	74	160	38	45	22	800
Casualties	Killed	10	2	—	2	4	1	9	1	1	2	32
	Seriously Injured	63	19	34	13	45	26	132	14	23	7	376
	Slightly Injured	150	73	115	135	181	97	149	52	81	23	1,056
1980	Accidents	118	41	86	72	110	73	191	33	41	27	792
Casualties	Killed	1	2	5	1	2	5	10	—	4	1	31
	Seriously Injured	71	15	31	12	46	26	122	12	18	6	359
	Slightly Injured	152	61	97	108	136	94	199	47	59	31	984
1981	Accidents	108	54	77	55	106	72	195	35	55	42	799
Casualties	Killed	2	4	2	—	2	5	3	—	2	7	27
	Seriously Injured	43	30	30	5	35	25	173	7	23	18	389
	Slightly Injured	141	69	87	79	133	87	217	41	62	36	952
1982	Accidents	107	50	79	48	120	77	201	34	60	29	805
Casualties	Killed	7	3	2	—	5	2	8	3	3	3	36
	Serious Injured	47	53	23	3	35	36	116	12	27	7	359
	Slightly Injured	123	37	110	61	160	108	227	38	69	28	961
1983	Accidents	113	46	65	50	107	73	159	30	66	25	734
Casualties	Killed	3	1	2	—	3	7	11	1	2	1	31
	Seriously Injured	33	57	22	4	33	32	87	14	15	10	307
	Slightly Injured	144	57	95	60	141	77	208	36	89	29	936

Further data are available in tables 4 and 8 of Road Accident Statistics English Regions 1982, a copy of which is in the Library.

Air and Water Pollution (Felixstowe Docks)

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure that appropriate precautions are taken against the possible discharge to air or water of polluting elements associated with transport or methyl isocyanate from Felixstowe docks to chemical plants in East Anglia and York hire.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand from the Health and Safety Executive that it is aware of infrequent consignments of methyl isocyanate from Felixstowe to Grimsby. It is transported in sealed stainless steel drums inside a freight container. The drums and their labelling and handling comply with the relevant national and international standards and with the existing and proposed regulations, and they are checked for any sign of leakage before being stored. The position will be reviewed in the light of the investigation into the Bhopal disaster.

Stoke-Derby Link and Etwall Bypass

Mrs Currie asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on the Stoke-Derby link road and the Etwall bypass in the south Derbyshire constituency; and if he can yet give dates for the start of construction of these roads.

Mrs. Chalker: I regret that progress on these schemes has been delayed by difficulties in updating the original traffic model. The consultants' report is not now expected until the spring of 1985. It will be some months before decisions can be made about order publication or start dates for construction. However as soon as the full data and information is received, the Department will proceed as quickly as possible to the next stage.

Car Radios (Traffic Information Systems)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to make the fitment of radio traffic information systems obligatory on radios fitted to all new cars.

Mrs. Chalker: We have no plans for such legislation.

London Regional Transport (Grants)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his proposals for the levy on London's ratepayers in support of his grants to London Regional Transport for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Under section 13 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984, I am empowered to make a levy on London ratepayers to cover up to two-thirds of the cost of my total grants to London Regional Transport for 1985-86. Accordingly I have today laid before Parliament a draft levy order, which is subject to affirmative resolution. This provides for a levy of 10·80 pence in the pound, estimated to raise £212 million. This is equivalent to 65·6 per cent. of my estimated expenditure on grants to LRT in 1985-86 of £323 million; the balance of £111 million comes from the Exchequer.

The Government have set LRT the primary task of securing better value for money through improved

efficiency. LRT's specific financial objective is to reduce the revenue support requirement to half the 1984-85 level of £190 million by 1987-88. This will enable the Government to continue to reduce the burden upon taxpayers and ratepayers, while providing for continuing substantial levels of capital investment.

Substantial progress is already being made towards these goals. The element of grant for revenue support—about £125 million—is £65 million below the GLC's 1984-85 provision. At the same time, the capital element of the grant—about £200 million—is £50 million more than the GLC's budgeted capital grant for this year. Yet in 1985-86, the ratepayer will have to find only £212 million towards this programme—some £50 million less than in 1984-85 on a comparable basis.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made an adjustment to the grant-related poundage schedule for London authorities in the rate support grant settlement to ensure that London ratepayers, and those elsewhere, are treated fairly following the transfer of LRT financing from local to central Government.

Improving efficiency has enabled LRT to contain their proposed fares increase in January to an average of 9 per cent., which will still leave fares about 10 per cent. lower, in real terms, than they were in May 1981 when the present GLC administration took office. LRT plan to maintain underground services at their present level for 1985-86 and to reduce bus services slightly, in line with falling demand.

The increase in resources for investment will enable LRT further to improve efficiency and to make public transport facilities more attractive to passengers including, for example, a substantial programme of station modernisation on the underground.

A420 (Reclassification)

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about his proposal to reclassify the A420 as a trunk road.

Mrs. Chalker: As my hon. Friend will now be aware, a draft order proposing that the A420 between Swindon and Oxford should become a trunk road, was published on 14 December. This road is part of an important route between Swindon and the midlands.

Travel Concessions (Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the chief executive of the Greater Manchester council with regard to travel concessions; what reply he is sending; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have received a letter dated 5 December from the chief executive and I am sending the hon. Gentleman a copy of my reply.

Oxford Circus Station (Fire)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the closed circuit television on the northbound Victoria Line platform at Oxford Circus assisted in detecting the station fire.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the fire was detected without the assistance of the closed circuit television system.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport who first detected the fire at Oxford Circus station.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand from London Regional Transport that a passenger leaving the station reported the fire to a station inspector at the ticket barrier at about 10 pm on the evening of 23 November.

British Transport Police

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his policy for the future of the British Transport police;

(2) if he will list the sites at which British Transport police are currently employed and those sites at which they were employed in 1979, giving the numbers employed at each site in both cases;

(3) what procedures there are for vetting private security firms where they are to take over the work of the British Transport police;

(4) what consultations he has had with employers and warehouse owners at the sites on which staff reductions are proposed for the British Transport police;

(5) whether he is satisfied that reductions in the numbers of British Transport police will have no adverse effect on Her Majesty's Government's ability to combat drug smuggling.

Mr. Ridley: I shall reply to these questions shortly.

Space Saver Spare Wheels

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he is satisfied that drivers of vehicles equipped with space saver spare wheels are adequately informed of the special precautions to be taken when driving on them;

(2) what safety tests have been carried out by his Department on space saver spare wheels; and what was the result;

(3) how many vehicles he estimates are fitted with space saver spare wheels rather than conventional ones.

Mrs. Chalker: We estimate that there are about 40,000 to 50,000 cars on our roads supplied with one of these spare wheels. Transport and road research laboratory tests show that the car's braking and cornering abilities remain satisfactory under normal conditions, but that if the car is driven at its limits of braking or cornering it may be more difficult to control than if fitted with a normal wheel.

We have no reason to question the adequacy of the advice given to drivers at present, eg in the vehicle handbook. A new international standard provides for clear information on the precautions needed including a speed restriction of 50 mph. We expect that standard to be formally adopted as an ECE Regulation next year, and we shall then be able to require new cars equipped with these spare wheels to conform with it.

Railway Safety

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set up an inquiry into railway safety standards with particular reference to staff levels and rostering and to investigate the effects of financial constraints on railway safety.

Mr. David Mitchell: There is no evidence of any general decline in safety on the railways. On the contrary, the railways have been getting progressively safer during the past decade. The number of significant passenger train accidents so far this year is no greater than in recent years. What marks 1984 as different is the bunching of accidents recently in a relatively short space of time, and the deeply-regretted number of passenger fatalities, which had been relatively high by railway standards, but for which one accident—at Polmont—is largely responsible.

All the recent accidents are being investigated, the more serious by formal inquiry, and there will be published reports on them. If the investigations indicate that staff levels, rostering, or the finance available to the Railways were significant factors, the chief inspecting officer will say so in his annual report on railway safety for 1984 which, in accordance with normal practice, will review the overall safety position. A separate inquiry into railway safety would merely duplicate the work of the independent railway inspectorate.

Motorway Lighting

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will undertake a study into the comparative cost savings involved in reducing road traffic accidents by increasing the lighting on motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: A study on this topic is already in hand and will take account of the examination of data referred to in my reply to a question by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 12 December 1984, at column *528*.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the accident on 11 December on the M25, he will make it his policy to light all stretches of motorway and A(M) roads so far unlit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend on 14 December 1984, at column *528*.

Singapore International Airlines

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any evidence of Singapore International Airlines receiving subsidies from the Singapore Government to promote Singapore International Airlines' activities in competition with British carriers.

Mr. Michael Spicer No.

Motorway Speed Limits

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to give statutory effect to advisory speed limits indicated on motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I am considering this matter and will make a statement as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to install overhead speed limit indicators on all motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Gantry mounted signals are installed on motorways where there is a need to display different restrictions over individual lanes. These are, typically, on the approaches to motorway/motorway interchanges, on an elevated motorway or on approaches to motorway tunnels.

Heathrow Airport (Traffic Movements)

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many fixed-wing movements have been excluded from the official air traffic movement figures at Heathrow in each of the years since 1979.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The figures for air transport movements published by the British Airports Authority exclude positioning flights, air taxi and general aviation movements. The number of movements accounted for by these categories of flight at Heathrow since 1979 is as follows:

	Number of Flights
1979	22,753
1930	21,486
1981	20,050
1982	21,883
1983	23,081
1984	*24,680

* January to November

Buses (Deregulation)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in those parts of the United Kingdom where trials have been undertaken into the consequences of deregulating bus transport, taxis were included.

Mr. David Mitchell: The trial area provisions of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 do not cover taxis. There are however other provisions of that Act under which taxis may be used to carry passengers at separate fares; they have been used successfully in some parts of the country, including the Devon trial area.

Taxis (Deregulation)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from those who represent taxi proprietors about the consequences of deregulating taxis; what has been the main emphasis of such representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received many representations from the National Federation of Taxi Associations, its constituent bodies, and individual taxi proprietors opposing any curb on the powers of district councils to restrict arbitrarily the number of taxi licences. They are concerned that increased competition will reduce their earnings, result in the operation of lower quality vehicles and reduce the value of 'plates'. I have replied that quality licensing, will continue and that the purpose of taxi licensing, like that of other licensing systems, is to protect the consumer; and that it was never intended to provide a marketable asset for the benefit of the licence holder. I have indicated that I am prepared to consider applying the system currently employed in Scotland.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has to support his conclusion that the deregulation of taxis would result in a superior or cheaper service to the public.

Mr. David Mitchell Artificial restrictions in the supply of any commodity are inimical to the interests of the consumer. The fact that, because of their scarcity in some areas, these licences change hands for considerable sums indicates that, in such areas, there is an expectation of enhanced earnings resulting from an undersupply of taxis. The National Consumers' Council and the Consumers' Association support deregulation of taxi numbers.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Transport what inquiries he has undertaken about the impact of deregulation of controls on taxis in the United States; and what information he has received about the impact of such deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received reports which allege that deregulation in the way it was carried out in some cities in the United States of America has undesirable side effects. We have chosen a more measured approach.

Southampton

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to implement section 7 of the Road Traffic Act 1974 in the city of Southampton.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no provisions to enable the section 7 ban on parking on footways in urban areas to be implemented in some places and not others.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 December 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Attorney-General what consideration he has given to bringing charges against officers of the National Union of Mineworkers for incitement to violence.

The Attorney-General: Incitement to violence is not a criminal offence, but an incitement by any person to others to commit a specific offence under the Offences against the Person Act 1861, or for them to commit offences against public order, such as riot or affray, renders the inciter liable to the criminal law. Such an offence of incitement is not one which a chief officer of police is bound to report to the Director of Public Prosecutions under the Prosecution of Offences Regulations 1978. However, the Director has had referred to him one case involving an alleged offence of incitement to riot by an officer of the National Union of Mineworkers, but the Director concluded that there was insufficient evidence for him to bring criminal proceedings. I am confident that if any chief officer of police has reason to think that any other offence of this type may have been committed and that there is evidence available which can properly be put before a court, he will refer that evidence to the Director for his consideration.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Literature (Asian Languages)

Mr. Madden asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will ensure that literature, available to the public on entering the Strangers' Gallery, is published in the main Asian languages.

Mr. Biffen: In the absence of significant demand for the "Guide to the Galleries" in Asian languages, I see no need for such provision.

Departmental Select Committees

Mr. Bruce George asked the Lord Privy Seal how many staff were employed within each department during the last session to liaise with a Select Committee; what is the grade of each civil servant; and whether the number employed or their grade has been altered since 1979 to 1983.

Mr. John Biffen [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *367*]: Liaison with Departmental Select Committees forms part of the duties of about 50 staff across Departments, ranging in grade from Executive Officer to Grade 3 (formerly Under Secretary). The time each spends on liaison work varies considerably from individual to individual and from Department to Department, depending on the Select Committee concerned and its programme of work. But, taking all Departments together, an estimated 2,300 man days a year are spent specifically on liaison, as distinct from other aspects of select committee work. This represents a small increase on previous years.

WALES

Health Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the most recent figures for the distribution of health expenditure for each Welsh area expressed in per capita terms and categorised according to *(a)* hospital services expenditure, *(b)* community health and family practitioners' services expenditure and *(c)* total expenditure.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The figures for 1983-84 are:

£ per capita

	Hospital Services	*Community Health and Family Practitioners' Services*	*Other Services*	*Total*
Clwyd	146·48	76·56	13·01	236·05
East Dyfed	161·32	81·59	17·83	241·13
Pembrokeshire	102·78		15·89	
Gwent	163·87	86·11	16·15	266·13
Gwynedd	134·71	90·67	20·32	245·70
Mid Glamorgan	153·61	84·74	13·83	252·18
Powys	137·53	89·88	23·88	251·29
South Glamorgan	259·37	86·72	25·84	371·93
West Glamorgan	152·00	86·66	14·22	252·88
WALES	165·22	84·65	17·14	267·01

Notes:
1. The expenditure figures used are taken from Annual Accounts submitted to the Department by District Health Authorities.
2. Other Services expenditure includes the cost of provision of Ambulance Services, the Blood Tranfusion Services, various other services and Headquarters administration.
3. The figures do not include the cost of certain services provided centrally, for example by the Dental Estimates Board and the Welsh Prescription

Pricing Committee.
4. One Family Practitioner Committee covers the area served by the East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire District Health Authorities.
5. The figures do not include expenditure defrayed by the Welsh Health Technical Services Organisation, principally on the central capital programme. This expenditure would add £9·44 to the Wales Hospital Services figure, £2·90 to the Wales Other Services figure and £12·34 to the Wales total figure.
6. The population figures used are the mid-year estimates of home population for 1983 which are the latest available. It is emphasized that the distribution of funds amongst District Health Authorities in Wales reflects teaching hospital costs (South Glamorgan is a teaching authority), differences in expenditure arising from the provision of regional and psychiatric services, the incidence of centrally funded developments and progress towards the equalisation of resources. Equalisation requirements are determined by comparing the relative resource shares of authorities in the previous year with their corresponding shares of the population weighted for such factors as age, sex, variations in mortality and cross-boundary flows of patients. It is therefore not possible to draw reliable conclusions from a straight comparison of per capita expenditure using crude resident population figures.

Education Statistics

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest estimates of his Department of the numbers and percentages of children of school age attending Welsh medium schools or Welsh units.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: In 1983-84, the latest year for which information is available, the number of full-time pupils attending designated bilingual primary and secondary schools was 20,450, 4·3 per cent. of all full-time primary and secondary pupils. These figures do not include pupils attending schools in mainly Welsh speaking areas where although the main medium of instruction is Welsh, the schools have not been formerly designated.

Children (Welsh Speakers)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest estimates available to his Department of the numbers and percentage of children under the age of 10 years classified as fluent Welsh speakers.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The available information relates to the numbers of primary school pupils aged five to nine who were assessed as being fluent in Welsh by their headteachers. In 1983-84, the latest year for which information is available, 25,057 pupils were deemed to be fluent Welsh speakers, 15 per cent. of all five to nine-year-old pupils in primary schools.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest estimates available to his Department of the numbers and percentage of children in secondary schools in Wales classified as fluent Welsh speakers.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: This information is not available centrally.

Conservation (Management Agreements)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those management agreements concluded in Wales by local authorities, pursuant to the Wildlife and Countryside Act, in respect of countryside outside specially designated areas, listing in each case the cost of such schemes; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the operation of the Act in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Information on managements agreements for non-designated areas is not available centrally. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was the first substantial piece of countryside legislation to be introduced in more than a decade and it addresses a wide range of difficult and contentious issues. Apart from defects in the provisions for notification of sites of special scientific interest, which we have acknowledged, the Act has proved well adapted to the situation in Wales and has been instrumental in developing co-operation between landowners, tenants and conservation bodies.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those sites of special scientific interest in Wales, and specify those which have been damaged or destroyed by pesticides since 1981.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: There are 561 sites of special scientific interest in Wales. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with details. The Nature Conservancy Council advise that no notified sites in Wales have been damaged or destroyed by pesticides since 1981.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the expenditure incurred, by county, in Wales on the the management of sites of special scientific interest during each year of operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The answer is as follows:

Expenditure under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

	£
Dyfed	
1984	577
Gwent	
1984	200
Gwynedd	
1983	750
1984	1150
Powys	
1984	1160

In addition expenditure as a result of management agreements under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Countryside Act 1968 is as follows:

	£
Dyfedd	
1981	810
1982	810
1983	810
1984	810
Gwynedd	
1981	2143
1982	2143
1983	2143
1984	2143
Mid Glamorgan	
1981	200
1982	200
1983	200

	£
1984	200
Powys	
1981	841
1982	841
1983	841
1984	841
South Glamorgan	
1981	86
1982	86
1983	86
1984	86

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by count, each registered site of special scientific interest in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: There are 561 sites of special scientific interest in Wales. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the details.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those sites of special scientific interest in Wales which have been destroyed or damaged during each year of the operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas : The Nature Conservancy Council has identified seven such sites in Wales which have been damaged or destroyed since the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 came into force. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the details.

Acid Rain

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many miles of Welsh inland waterways have been affected by acid rain;

(2) how many (i) rivers and (ii) lakes have been affected by acid rain in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 11 December at c. 445 an expert group has been established to assess the extent of acidification of freshwaters in Scotland, England and Wales and the causes of acidification.

Home Helps

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many home helps per thousand of the population there are at present in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At 31 September 1984, there were in Wales 1·16 whole-time equivalent home helps per thousand population.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the expenditure incurred, by county, in Wales on the operation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act during each year of its operation.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: I regret that this information is not available.

National Parks

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the powers available to national park authorities to prevent damaging development in the areas over which they have jurisdiction.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: National park authorities have a number of powers available. They operate as the local planning authority for the area under their jurisdiction; they have the power under Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to enter into management agreements with owners and occupiers of land within their area for the purpose of conserving or enhancing the natural beauty or amenity of the countryside; and they have the opportunity in advance of the work being carried out to object to applications upon which it is intended to claim grant under the agricultural and horticultural development and agricultural and horticultural grant schemes and to have their objections considered by the appropriate Minister, in Wales the Secretary of State.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Drivers

Q19. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister what instructions are given to the drivers of Ministers' cars regarding their driving practices.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

It is not the practice to publish details of the instructions given to ministerial drivers.

HMS Conqueror

Q22. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister whether the record of signals sent by Fleet headquarters, Northwood, to HMS Conqueror and received from HMS Conqueror by Fleet headquarters, Northwood, in April to July 1982, has been retained.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 6 December, and to the letter of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Gentleman of 23 November.

Coal Industry Dispute

Q25. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister if she will arrange to meet Mr. Arthur Scargill to discuss the mining dispute.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no such plans. No one wishes more than this Government to see the industry return to normal working. The NUM leadership however has yet to show that it really wishes to achieve a constructive negotiated settlement.

Strathkelvin

Q76. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to pay an official visit to Strathkelvin.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Leith

Q82. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Leith.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Latham asked the Prime Minister whether she will list her official engagements for 18 December.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 18 December.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 18 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend is paying an official visit to the People's Republic of China.

London-New York (Air Travel)

Mr. Lawler asked the Prime Minister if she will give an estimate of the cost of all air fares paid for by Her Majesty's Government in 1983 for journeys between London and New York.

The Prime Minister: The cost of air fares paid for by Her Majesty's Government in 1983 for journeys between London and New York is of the order of £60,000. I regret that a more precise figure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lawler: asked the Prime Minister how much money would have been saved if each flight paid for by Her Majesty's Government between London and New York in 1983 had been booked *(a)* with the British commercial carrier offering the lowest price at the time each flight was made, and *(b)* with the British commercial carrier currently offering the lowest price.

The Prime Minister: I regret that the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Lawler asked the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's current policy regarding the choice of carrier for flights paid for by Her Majesty's Government between London and New York.

The Prime Minister: Her Majesty's Government policy is to require Ministers and civil servants to travel by British airlines on all official journeys overseas by air, unless to do so would impose unreasonable delay or would otherwise not be in the public interest.

Departmental Policy Reviews

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister how many policy reviews have been announced by Government Departments since June 1983; how many such reviews have been completed to date; how many management consultants have been retained by Government Departments since June 1983; and at what total cost to date.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.
I shall reply to the hon. Member shortly.

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Energy what recent representations he has received from industry urging that energy prices to industry should not be increased to cover increased costs to the energy supply industries arising from the miners' strike.

Mr. Goodlad: I have received a number of representations from trade associations and individual firms expressing their concern that the miners' strike might lead to higher electricity prices. I have informed these organisations that no decisions have been taken on how the costs arising from the strike will be met.

Plutonium

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide information on the end-use of plutonium produced in Britain in the last year.

Mr. Goodlad: I can confirm that no plutonium derived from CEGB or SSEB power stations has been used other than for civil purposes in the last year; and, that Her Majesty's Government's policy in this area remains as given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 4 February 1983, at column 206.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a record of the amount of plutonium produced at Wylfa during the first three years of its existence.

Mr. Goodlad: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) on 9 March 1983, at column 401.

Nuclear Reactors (Safeguards)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the Central Electricity Generating Board power stations which are under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards;

(2) if he will list the nuclear reactors in the United Kingdom which are under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Mr. Goodlad: The nuclear reactors in the United Kingdom, including those contained in CEGB and SSEB power stations, which are included in the list of facilities subject to the UK-Euratom-IAEA safeguards agreement are as follows:

Central Electricity Generating board
Bradwell Nuclear Power Station
Berkeley Nuclear Power station
Dungeness 'A' Nuclear Power Station
Dungeness 'B' Nuclear Power Station
Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station
Heysham I Nuclear Power Station

Hinkley Point 'A' Nuclear Power Station
Hinkley Point 'B' Nuclear Power Station
Oldbury Nuclear Power Station
Sizewell 'A' Nuclear Power Station
Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station
Wylfa Nuclear Power Station
Berkeley Nuclear labs zero energy research reactor
South of Scotland Electricity Board
Hunterston 'A' Nuclear Power Station
Hunterston 'B' Nuclear Power Station
Civil Research Reactors
University of Strathclyde: Scottish Universities research reactor, East Kilbride
Imperial College: Consort research reactor, Ascot
Universities Research Reactor, Risley
Imperial Chemical Industries: triga reactor, Billingham
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Atomic Energy Establishment Winfrith
Zero Energy Breeder Reactor (ZEBRA)
Steam Generating Heavy Water Reactor (SGHWR)
Nestor
Dimple
Hector
Dounreay Nuclear Power Development Establishment
Prototype Fast Reactor (PFR)
Atomic Energy Research Establishment Harwell
Materials Test Reactor (Pluto)
Graphite Low Energy Experimental Pile (Gleep)

Under article 78(A) of the UK-Euratom-IAEA safeguards agreement it is up to the IAEA to designate from this list those facilities which it wishes to inspect. On this subject I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question on 3 December, at columns 23-24.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate how much nuclear waste is likely to be produced in the United Kingdom by the year 2000; and if he will indicate separately the quantities of high, intermediate and low-level wastes that will need to be accommodated.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

The cumulative volumes of radioactive wastes likely to exist by the year 2000 are:

	Number
High activity wastes	4,300 m^3
Intermediate activity wastes	90,000 m^3
Low activity wastes	500,000 m^3

These figures include wastes existing now and those likely to arise in future from existing nuclear installations and those currently under construction. They also include the wastes likely to arise from the new floc precipitation plant at Sellafield announced today. They do not include wastes that would arise from the CEGB's proposed power station at Sizewell in Suffolk if it were to be built. The totals include significant amounts of mainly low activity wastes (110,000 m^3) from the production and use of radioisotopes for medical and industrial purposes and from other miscellaneous activities.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Plastic Baton Rounds

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions concerning the use of plastic baton rounds in England and Wales are currently in force.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 7 December, at columns 306-7.

Finnimore Wood Youth Custody Centre

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will order an inquiry into the running of Finnimore Wood youth custody centre;

(2) what representations he has received from the Prison Officers Association concerning events at Finnimore Wood youth custody centre;

(3) whether he is satisfied with the recruitment and supervision of teachers in Finnimore Wood youth custody centre.

Mr. Mellor: At recent meetings with the prison department the Prison Officers Association made a number of assertions about misbehaviour by inmates at Finnimore Wood youth custody centre, and these are being fully investigated. We are satisfied with the recruitment and supervision of teachers at the establishment: the question of prison officer manning while evening education is taking place is under consideration.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those individuals charged with offences arising out of the current miners' dispute have been office holders of the National Union of Mineworkers; and with what offences they were charged.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not readily available.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by police force of the number of days of sick leave which serving police officers have been forced to take as a result of injuries sustained during the course of the miners' dispute.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by degree of seriousness and by police force of injuries sustained by serving police officers during the course of the current miners' dispute which have so far been brought to his attention.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally relates to the police force area in which injuries were sustained, rather than to the police forces from which the officers came, and does not distinguish between serious and less serious injuries. During the period 13 March to 13 December inclusive, the number of injuries was as follows:

Police force area	*Number of injuries*
Cleveland	2
Derbyshire	243
Durham	43
Dyfed-Powys	4
Essex	7
Greater Manchester	13

Police force area	Number of injuries
Gwent	3
Humberside	2
Kent	64
Lancashire	1
Merseyside	4
Metropolitan	4
Northumbria	37
North Wales	1
North Yorkshire	14
Nottinghamshire	130
South Wales	40
South Yorkshire	335
Staffordshire	18
Sussex	2
Thames Valley	2
Warwickshire	2
West Yorkshire	290
TOTAL	1,261

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by type of offence for which charges have been brought following incidents which have taken place in the course of the current miners' dispute, stating in each category *(a)* the total number of charges brought, *(b)* the number of individuals charged, *(c)* the number of cases tried, *(d)* the number of convictions made and *(e)* the number of custodial sentences which resulted.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally relates to the period from 13 March to 11 December inclusive, for which I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on 14 December, at column 638. The total number of immediate custodial sentences imposed during that period, including sentences to youth custody or detention in a detention centre, imposed during that period was 118.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total additional cost to date of policing the miners' dispute in south Wales which has been borne by local authority expenditure; and what is the extent to which this additional expenditure, by local authority, will attract overspending penalty.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that up to 31 October the additional costs to the South Wales police authority resulting from the policing of the miners' dispute in the police area were some £370,000, 50 per cent. of which will be met by police grant from the Home Office. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has announced that additional costs resulting from the policing of the dispute will be disregarded for grant holdback purposes.

Drugs Offences

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people in Wales have so far this year been convicted of crimes associated with the possession of heroin or similar drugs;

(2) how many people in Wales in 1983-84 were convicted of drug-related offences.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available information relates to 1983, when 1,110 persons were found guilty in Wales of offences under drugs legislation or of other offences involving controlled drugs, 92 of whom were found guilty of offences involving class A drugs, as defined in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Corresponding statistics for 1984 will be published next summer.

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to ban the broadcasting on any television channel of programmes about sports events sponsored by tobacco companies.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the identity of the assistant secretary in his Department referred to by Lord Donaldson, Master of the Rolls, in Findlay *v.* Secretary of State for Home Affairs as having sworn an affidavit, the tenor of which was described as untrue;

(2) whether any disciplinary action has been taken against the assistant secretary in the Home Department referred to by Lord Donaldson, Master of the Rolls, in Findlay *v.* Secretary of State for Home Affairs as having sworn an affidavit which was described as untrue.

Mr. Brittan: The affidavit in question was sworn by Mr. A. H. Turney, an assistant secretary in my Department, and was a true statement. It was sworn in the context of evidence already before the court that, as I had announced to Parliament in my statement of 30 November 1983, at columns 513-15, four life sentence prisoners had before that date been moved from open to closed prisons because their release in the relatively near future would not have accorded with my view of the gravity of their offences. It was intended not to qualify that evidence in any way, but to explain that a move to open prison, especially without a provisional release date, does not import any commitment to release a life sentence prisoner. I recognise that there may have been some ambiguity, which I regret, in the wording both of my statement and of the affidavit; but the matter was elucidated by counsel to the satisfaction of the court. No question of disciplinary action against Mr. Turney arises.

"Drinking Sensibly"

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many copies of the Department of Health and Social Security leaflet, "Drinking Sensibly", are now in circulation; and what response has been received therefrom to date.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

The initial 5,000 published copies of "Drinking Sensibly"* have all been distributed and a further reprint of 2,500 copies took place in 1983. More than 1,000 copies were distributed to professional, voluntary and other organisations concerned in combating alcohol misuse. The purpose of this discussion document is to provide facts and present issues to help clarify public debate rather than to invite correspondence. Responses include the use made of the material in press articles and day conferences and some letters.

* Prevention and Health: Drinking Sensibly a discussion document prepared by the Health Department of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Elections (Impersonation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of *(a)* the number of offences reported and *(b)* the number of prosecutions for voting more than once in the general elections of 1983, 1979 and 1974 in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) Great Britain.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 November 1984, c. *349*]: Further to the information given on 13 December, at column 567, in respect of England and Wales, I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that the following information for Scotland does not distinguish offences of personation from other voting offences nor offences committed at a general election from those committed at by-elections or local elections.

Crimes against the Representation of the People Act 1949 and 1983 recorded by the police and persons subsequently proceeded against for those offences in Scotland

Year	Offences reported	Persons proceeded against
1974	10	1
1979	3	3
1983	1	*8

* Eight persons involved in one offence.

I also understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the available information for Northern Ireland is that in 1983 149 persons were arrested for offences against the Representation of the People Act 1983, of whom 104 were subsequently prosecuted. Corresponding figures for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Longmoor Base, Hampshire

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Hampshire police as to how many persons have been arrested by the police at demonstrations outside and inside Longmoor camp and on which days; and how many were charged.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 November 1984, c. *264*]: My right hon. and learned Friend has now received and considered a report from the chief constable. The chief constable reports that one person was arrested by the police outside military land on 16 November, and that 25 people were arrested by the police inside military land on 17 November. None has yet been charged.

SCOTLAND

New Towns

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when the report of the working party on the transfer of housing in Scottish new towns will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: The working party completed its report this summer. Printing difficulties delayed its publication but it is now available. I am arranging for copies to be sent to Scottish Members with new towns in their constituencies and to have a copy deposited in the Library. The working party included representatives of the Industry Department for Scotland, the new town development corporations and the district councils, nominated by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. The working party's terms of reference were to devise a model scheme for the transfer of rented housing owned by Scottish new town development corporations to the district councils for their areas. The scheme was to be applicable, with adjustments, to all five new towns when the wind-up process for each development corporation began. The working party was asked to take account of a number of factors, ranging from the financial implications of transfer to the possible need for legislation.

I welcome the working party's report which will be of considerable practical value when the time comes to begin the transfer process. This will not occur until a development corporation has begun to be wound up and as I announced on 14 November that wind-up will not begin before April 1990. In the meantime the working party has suggested that development corporations and district councils may be able to ease the eventual transfer process by taking preparatory steps in advance. These would include moving towards a common approach on rental structures, and in general matters of policy and administration where this is not already the case. The working party has also made a number of recommendations for legislation. We will be considering these carefully, with a view to ensuring that any necessary legislative provision is made in good time.

Nursery Education

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about Government policy concerning the benefits of providing and receiving nursery education.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Nursery education has to be seen in the context of other kinds of provision, including voluntary provision, for pre-school children. My Department is now carrying out a national study of provision for under-sixes. When the report of the study becomes available, we shall consider the policy implications for nursery education.

Pre-School Children

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what forecast his Department has made of the likely number of pre-school children in the foreseeable future.

Mr. John MacKay: A projection of the population of Scotland for the period 1983 to 2023 has recently been prepared by the Government Actuary in consultation with the Registrar General. A summary of the results including the projected numbers of children aged nought to four years was published in the Registrar General for Scotland's "Vital Statistics Return for Weeks 37 to 40, 1984", a copy of which is in the Library. A brief summary of the assumptions underlying the projection is also shown.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of pre-school children in Dundee and Scotland in each of the next three years; and what are the current figures.

Mr. John MacKay: The Registrar General makes estimates of population each year for the immediately preceding year. The current estimate is that for 1983. Projections of population over the succeeding years are made biennally by the Government Actuary in consultation with the Registrar General and are based on the most recent estimates available. The 1983 estimate and the latest projected population of children aged nought to four years in Scotland for the years to 1987 are shown in the table. A consistent projection for Dundee is not yet available. The previous projection for both Scotland and Dundee, based on the 1981 estimate, is also shown in the table. The 1983 based projection assumes a slower rise in fertility, following analysis of recent trends. Also the 1983 population base takes account of information from the 1981 Census of Population which was not available at the time of fixing the 1981 base and this obscures comparison between the two projections.

Projected population aged 0-4, Scotland, Dundee

('000)

	1983 based		*1981 based*	
	Scotland	*Dundee*	*Scotland*	*Dundee*
1983	*328	*10·6	325	10·7
1984	327	na	328	10·8
1985	324	na	331	11·0
1986	322	na	335	11·0
1987	323	na	342	11·3

* Estimated population for 30 June 1983

Council House Sales

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing, for Scotland, the gross receipts from selling council houses under the right-to-buy policy for the years 1979-80 to the latest available year.

Mr. Ancram: Receipts from the sale of council houses sold under the right to buy provisions of the Tenants' Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 cannot be separately identified in the returns submitted by local authorities. The following table shows the gross receipts which have accrued to district and islands councils from all sales of houses held on their housing revenue accounts — including sales to sitting tenants under voluntary sales policies and sales of vacant houses:—

Gross Receipts from sales of Council Houses held on District and Islands Councils' Housing Revenue Aecounts

Year	*Gross Receipts (£ million)*
1979-80	5·807
1980-81	19·609
1981-82	62·170
1982-83	103·338
1983-84	123·034
1984-85	*116·239

* Estimate

Health Boards (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish health boards will meet the timetable set by him in June of obtaining tenders for ancillary services by 31 December.

Mr. John MacKay: Health boards have been asked to report by April 1985 progress made with testing the cost-effectiveness of their support services.

Parole

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any proposals for changing the parole arrangements in Scotland.

Mr. Younger: I share the public concern about the level of violent crime and of drug trafficking, and, in order to reinforce the deterrent effect of the longer sentences of imprisonment for such offences, I have made clear to the Parole Board for Scotland that I would be reluctant to exercise my discretion so as to authorise early release of a prisoner who is serving a sentence of more than five years for such offences any more than a few months before he would otherwise be released, except in cases where the circumstances are exceptional. I have, however, assured the Parole Board for Scotland that it will continue to see all the cases that it has hitherto scrutinised, following the initial review by the local review committees, so that the board will have the opportunity to bring to my attention in any such case circumstances which in its view are exceptional. The parole board recognises that it is for me, under the statute, to decide whether to accept or reject a recommendation by the parole board.

The release on licence of life sentences prisoners is at my discretion, subject to a favourable recommendation by the Parole Board for Scotland and to consultation with the Lord Justice General and (if he is available) the trial judge. While I am satisfied that the safety of the public has always been, and will continue to be, a paramount consideration for the Parole Board for Scotland as it is for myself, I am concerned to emphasise the deterrent effect of sentences of life imprisonment, especially those for the murders of police officers, murders by terrorists, sexual or sadistic murders of children or murders committed by firearm in the commission of crime. Accordingly I have made clear to the Parole Board for Scotland that only in exceptional circumstances would I feel that release earlier than 20 years would be appropriate for a prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment for such a crime; and indeed there will be cases where the gravity of the offence requires a still longer period; the same may apply to other murders. I do not, however, propose to make any changes in the procedures for the consideration for release of life sentence prisoners in Scotland, including those of the preliminary review committee which I introduced in 1980, which in my view sufficiently provide for me to obtain an initial judicial view on the requirements of retribution and deterrence, in addition to the later consultation for which statute provides. I have consulted the Lord Justice General in this matter, and have ascertained that he also is content with the present arrangements. I am, however, concerned that the Parole Board for Scotland should continue to see all those cases which would hitherto have been referred to it, so that it may have the opportunity of bringing to my attention any circumstances which it considers to be exceptional.

In forming my views on these matters, I have taken into account my discussion of them with the Parole Board for Scotland. I should add that they will not affect any case of a life sentence prisoner to whom a provisional release date has already been intimated, nor any determinate

sentence prisoner concerning whom the parole board had made recommendations to me before my discussion with them. I am glad to have this opportunity to repeat that I have the highest regard for the assiduity with which the parole board undertakes its difficult task and the care with which it examines each individual case on its merits.

I have also considered most carefully whether there is a need, in Scotland, to reduce the minimum qualifying period for parole to a shorter period (it is now six months in England and Wales). I have decided not to do this. Our parole system in Scotland has developed along distinctive lines, and I am not aware of any general dissatisfaction in Scotland about the range of inmates who are covered by the parole scheme. In particular, I do not think that the additional resources that would be required, especially by regional social work departments to provide supervision for short periods of parole, could be justified. I am, however, concerned about the number of persons serving short terms of imprisonment for fines default. I am impressed by the results of the fines enforcement officer schemes in Airdrie and Edinburgh and now propose to extend the scheme on a more permanent basis to other sheriff courts in Scotland in order to assist those for whom the court regards a fine as the appropriate disposal to satisfy the sentence without being subjected to imprisonment.

Local Government Expenditure

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he proposes in the system for the control of local authority capital expenditure.

Mr. Younger: I am broadly satisfied with the operation of the local authority capital control system in Scotland, but I propose two modest changes which will lead to more flexible management of the local authority capital cash blocks Scottish Office—local authority 1 and Scottish Office—local authority 2. At present my Department can carry forward to the following year an underspend on either cash block up to a maximum of 2 per cent. of the appropriate cash limit; in future the maximum will be 5 per cent. Furthermore if it appears that an overspend is likely on either block I will refrain from taking any mid-year corrective action unless the probable outturn looks like exceeding 105 per cent. of the appropriate cash limit.

THE ARTS

European Music Year

Mr. Murphy asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of Arts how Her Majesty's Government intend to mark European Music Year, other than on the European Day of Music itself, as outlined by the Prime Minister in her reply of 5 December.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and noble Friend is to give a reception to mark the opening of the Handel festival in July. Arrangements for the festival, and for many other events to be held during the year, are in the hands of the European Music Year (UK) Committee.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Public Expenditure Programme

Mr. Lightbown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of the housing public expenditure programme for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: Following discussions with the local authority associations at the Housing Consultative Council on 30 November and with the Chairman of the Housing Corporation, I am able to announce decisions on housing capital and current expenditure for 1985-86.

Total provision for housing capital expenditure in 1985-86, including forecast housing capital receipts next year of £1,731 million, is £3,055 million. I have decided to allocate those resources as follows:

	£ million
Local authorities	2,324
Housing Corporation	685
New Towns	43
Home Loan	3

Capital resources next year for the Housing Corporation include net provision for £605 million plus estimated capital receipts of £80 million. This will maintain provision for a substantial level of investment by the corporation. I will announce the detailed breakdown of the corporation's approved development programme as soon as possible.

The New Towns' share of resources again reflects the fact that the publicly-rented building programme in the New Towns has virtually ended. The remaining investment is concentrated on providing sites for private development, on shared ownership and on repair and improvement of dwellings prior to transfer to local authorities.

The provision of £2,324 million for local authorities includes forecast capital receipts of £1,595 million. Details of those forecast receipts and of the underlying assumptions were given in reply to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) on 12 December at column *500*.

My right hon. Friend is announcing separately today the arrangements for local authority capital programmes in 1985-86 including proposed changes in the prescribed proportions of capital receipts and other measures to reduce the risk of overspending the cash limit.

The HIP allocation total for 1985-86 is £1,600 million. Authorities will be able to reinvest their capital receipts, albeit at the reduced prescribed proportions. On the basis of our forecasts, authorities will be able to undertake at least an extra £325 million of investment in addition to their HIP allocations, from receipts arising in 1985-86. I have discussed with the local authority associations the method of distributing that total between individual authorities. Each authority will be informed shortly of its allocation.

As regards housing current expenditure, I have considered carefully the views of the local authority associations on the consultation papers which I issued on reckonable income and on reckonable expenditure on management and maintenance for 1985-86.

I have decided to determine an increase in the local contribution for housing subsidy purposes of 60p a dwelling a week. It is for authorities themselves to decide how to finance that contribution. On management and

maintenance, I have decided to increase the expenditure counting towards the subsidy calculation by 4 per cent. over the level assumed for 1984-85.

Sellafield (Discharges)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures are being taken to reduce liquid discharges of radioactivity from Sellafield.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The radiochemical inspectorate of my Department, jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has already put forward formal proposals for a variation of the authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, so that the limits will reflect the substantial reductions in actual discharges that have been achieved in the past few years and place extra controls on the amounts discharged over short periods, and on solvent and particulates. This variation, which also contains a formal requirement that the best practicable means must be used to limit discharges, is expected to come into force early in the New Year.

The site ion exchange plant, constructed at a cost of £130 million, will come into operation next year and will make possible a further reduction in discharge of caesium, to one tenth of the maximum released in recent years. The new salt evaporator, also due to come into operation next year at a cost of £30 million, will make possible a parallel reduction in dischargess of plutonium and other alpha emitters, to about 200 curies a year. Formal proposals to replace the existing authorisation by a new and more stringent one will be put forward by the authorising Departments next year, and the opportunity will also be taken to set specific limits on a much larger number of individual radionuclides. The local authorities will be consulted about the new draft authorisation, as will the water and health authorities, and sea fisheries committees.

Beyond that, the achievement of a further significant reduction on a continuing basis depends on the construction of major new treatment plant. The Government, after a review of the options in consultation with the company, has approved the company's proposal to build a floc precipitation plant, costing £150 million, which would be in operation by 1991. The target is to reduce discharges to less than 20 curies a year of alpha activity and about 8,000 curies a year of beta/gamma activity (other than tritium). The latter figure is below the level currently achieved by the only plant in any way comparable, the newer French reprocessing plant at Cap de la Hague, and the alpha figure is approximately equal to the current figure for that plant. These figures include an allowance for the new reprocessing plant for oxide fuel. Further reductions will be obtained when the present reprocessing plant for magnox fuel goes out of operation in the early years of the next century. At that time the targets will be to reduce discharges to not more than 5 curies a year of alpha activity and not more than 2,000 curies a year of beta/gamma activity (other than tritium).

This programme of measures complies with the recommendation of the Paris commission on the prevention of pollution from land-based sources that contracting parties should take account of the best available technology at nuclear reprocessing plants, in order to minimise radioactive discharges to the marine environment. The Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee has confirmed that, in its view, this programme takes full account of all the scientific evidence, and is consistent with the United Kingdom's policy objectives for radioactive waste management, particularly the objective of reducing discharges to the lowest reasonably practicable. The estimated annual radiation dose to the small critical group of people eating large amounts of fish and shellfish will be reduced to well below 10 per cent. of the limit recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection, as compared with 54 per cent. in 1982.

The two authorising Departments plan to review the authorisation every three years, in line with a recommendation in the Black report. For the purposes of such reviews, they will draw upon the results from an expanded programme of environmental monitoring they have now required BNFL to carry out as from January 1985, as well as their own check monitoring and relevant research. They will also take full account of advice on the health aspects of discharges, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health is considering, in the light of the Black report, how such advice can be best provided.

Metropolitan County Enterprise Boards

72. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the contribution to job creation and maintenance by the various metropolitan county enterprise boards; and if he will make a statement.

73. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the contribution of job creation and maintenance by the various metropolitan county enterprise boards; and if he will make a statement.

74. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent assessment he has made of the contribution by the Greater Manchester Economic Development Corporation Limited towards employment creation in Greater Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The establishment of enterprise boards and similar bodies is one means by which local authorities can make a contribution to local economic development. It is for the councils concerned to satisfy themselves as to its worth.

Rates

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects to issue the consultation paper on the valuation of domestic properties for rating purposes.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 22 October at c. 491.

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much sponsorship money sport receives from the tobacco industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Under the voluntary agreement on sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies in the United

Kingdom the industry informs my Department of its expenditure on sports sponsorship in confidence. I cannot therefore make the information available. However, the agreement restricts companies' expenditure to the 1976 level with due allowance for inflation.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much additional money sport receives from sponsorhip from non-govermental sponsors, other than the tobacco industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: This information is not available. However, the Sports Council has estimated that sport received about £100 million last year in sponsorship from all sources.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the number of sporting events which were sponsored in 1983 and the number which were sponsored by the tobacco industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Information on events sponsored by the tobacco industry is supplied to my Department in confidence by the industry. I cannot therefore make that information available. The further information sought is also unavailable.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consult the medical profession before considering any renewal of the voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry on the sponsorship of sport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The British Medical Association has recently asked to discuss sports sponsorship by the tobacco industry and the voluntary agreement with my right hon. Friend. As the Minister responsible for the agreement, I shall be pleased to meet a delegation from the BMA and hear at first hand their views. I shall, of course, take these into account when considering the voluntary agreement, which stands until at least 31 December 1985.

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Dwellings

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in discussions between his Department and the National House Building Council in respect of establishing agreed standards of repairs to the various types of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Gow: Discussions are continuing. I will reply fully to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

London (Housing)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has as to how many London boroughs operate special lettings schemes for key workers and for people with priority on medical grounds in the allocation of their housing stock;

(2) what information he has to which London boroughs operate a special housing register for engaged couples and for those who do not qualify for rehousing because they do not meet residence qualifications;

(3) what information he has to the proportion of applicants on housing waiting lists in inner London who require bedsits and as to what proportion need two or more bedrooms.

Sir George Young: I would refer the hon. Member to my answer to him about London waiting lists on 6 December 1984 at column *238*.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the recent report by Shelter Housing Aid Centre, the London Housing Aid Centre, a copy of which has been sent to him, in respect of the employment impact of a programme to tackle London's housing problems.

Sir George Young: I have nothing to add to my answer to the hon. Member on 10 December at column *392*.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of how many new jobs would be created *(a)* in the construction industry and *(b)* in the wider economy for each additional 1,000 new houses built and for each additional 1,000 major renovations in the public and in the private sectors.

Sir George Young: The information specifically requested for these building activities is not available.

Squatting

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has of the extent of uncontrolled squatting in council dwellings in London.

Sir George Young: This is a matter for the local authorities which own the dwellings.

Fire Service, London

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the basis on which he determined the 1984-85 grant related expenditure for the fire service in London.

Mr. Waldegrave: Grant related expenditure for the fire service is calculated on the basis of a single national formula for all authorities comprising the following factors: population, total area, density of settlement, the average number of fire calls in 1981 and 1982, and the area of high fire risk, with adjustments for higher labour costs in and around London and special costs for the Isles of Scilly.

Asbestos Cement

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy of the Property Services Agency about safety aspects relating to the use of asbestos cement in the refurbishing of public buildings.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Block Grant Entitlements

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each authority designated under the Rates Act 1984 the estimated block grant entitlements he has taken into account in determining the provisional maximum rate; and what are (i) the assumptions made about that authority's expenditure in 1985-86 and (ii) the assumptions made about all non-designated authorities' expenditure in 1985-86, in determining that grant entitlement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984]: The calculation of the proposed

maximum rate or precept for each designated authority includes the block grant I estimate will become payable to the authority, including any receipts from the London rate equalisation scheme where appropriate. It assumes that the same figure (in cash) as in 1984-85 will be disregarded for the purposes of implementing grant penalties in 1985-86. It makes no allowance for close-ending of block grant.

Rates Act 1984

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received since 17 January concerning the provisions of the Rates Act 1984 from people living in the designated authorities, indicating how many letters have come from people in each constituency covered wholly or in part by the 18 authorities.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984]: The number of letters received in respect of each of the selected authorities is as follows:

	Number of letters received
Basildon	3
Brent	5
Camden	34
GLC	—
Greenwich	5
Hackney	3
Haringey	16
ILEA	1,115
Islington	16
Lambeth	9
Leicester	6
Lewisham	4
Merseyside	—
Portsmouth	1
Sheffield	33
Southwark	3
South Yorkshire	91
Thamesdown	2

Information as to the number of letters from each constituency is not available.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each authority designated under the Rates Act 1984 the assumptions he has made in respect of (i) exclusive penny rate products, (ii) expenditure for 1983-84 and 1984-85, (iii) rate fund revenue balances, (iv) special fund balances, (v) capital fund balances, (vi) *(a)* trading account balances in respect of public transport and *(b)* other trading account balances, (vii) housing revenue account balances and (viii) balances of other funds and other credit balances excluding those in respect of liabilities, capital discharged and capital receipts, in determining their provisional maximum rates.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: [*Pursuant to his reply*, December 1984]: Where information requested by me for the purpose of exercising my powers under Part I of the rates Act 1984 was not furnished by a designated authority, I have made such assumptions about matters relevant to the calculation of their proposed rate or precept limit as I have thought appropriate, as I am empowered to do under section 8(1) of the Act. I have also taken into account relevant financial returns made by each authority to my Department, any additional information supplied to me by authorities and further informtion available to me. Authorities have been informed that they have until 15 January, 1985 to comment on the rate or precept limit proposed.

St. George's Hall, Liverpool

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent action his Department has taken to secure the future of St. George's hall, Liverpool.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Further to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government's answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool West Derby on 22 November 1984 my officials are meeting Liverpool City Council today to discuss what progress the Council has made. [Vol. 68, c. 282.]

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will give a breakdown by rank of the numbers of individuals serving in each regiment within the Territorial Army in Cheshire;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* those units of the Territorial Army and their respective strengths which are based in Cheshire.

Mr. Lee: A breakdown by rank of the number of individuals serving in each Territorial Army unit based in Cheshire, together with the respective strengths of those units as at 11 December 1984 is as follows:

Unit	*Location*	*Officers*					*Soldiers*							
		Major	*Capt.*	*Lt.*	*2/Lt.*	*Total*	*WO1*	*WOII*	*SSgt.*	*Sgt.*	*Cpl.*	*L/Cpl.*	*Private*	*Total*	*Totals*
C (Cheshire Yeomanry) Squadron, The Queen's Own Yeomanry	Chester	1	2	4	2	9	—	1	2	13	24	26	67	133	142
80 (Cheshire Yeomanry) Signals Squadron, 33rd (Lancashire and Cheshire) Signals Regiment (Volunteers)	Chester	1	7	4	2	14	—	2	4	14	19	24	63	126	140
Headquarters 42nd Infantry Brigade	Chester	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Detachment B Company, 2nd Battalion Mercian Volunteers	Crewe	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	1	3	30	36	37
C Company, 2nd Battalion Mercian Volunteers	Ellesmere Port	—	1	2	—	3	—	1	2	6	11	6	98	124	127
Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th/8th (Volunteer) Battalion The Kings Regiment	Warrington	5	3	1	1	10	—	7	3	16	14	18	38	96	106
D Company, 5th/8th (Volunteer) Battalion The Kings Regiment	Warrington	—	1	1	1	3	—	1	1	2	8	7	63	82	85
The North West Infantry Band (TAVR) (KINGS)	Warrington	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	2	2	4	17	27	27

Unit	Location	Officers					Soldiers							
		Major	Capt.	Lt.	2/Lt.	Total	WO1	WOII	S/Sgt.	Sgt.	Cpl.	L/Cpl.	Private	Total	Totals
C Troop, 213 (South Lancashire Artillery) Battery, 103 Air Defence Regiment, Royal Artillery	Widnes	—	1	1	—	2	—	1	2	4	9	9	31	56	58
Detachment 224 (North Staffs) Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers)	Crewe	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	1	18	21	22
Detachment 224 (North Staffs) Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers)	Macclesfield	—	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	2	2	18	23	25
Detachment 207 (Manchester) General Hospital, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers)	Macclesfield	2	4	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	1	9	29	39	45
Detachment 208 (Manchester) General Hospital Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers)	Ellesmere Port	2	2	—	—	4	—	—	1	5	1	4	11	22	26
Totals		12	23	14	7	56	1	13	17	65	93	113	483	785	†841

Notes:

* A detachment of C company is based at Northwich.

† These figures represent numbers of Territorial Army soldiers only, and do not include Regular Army staff, non-Regular permanent staff or civilians attached to these Territorial Army units.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline his plans for the future strengths of those units of the Territorial Army currently based in Cheshire.

Mr. Lee: As part of our phase II expansion of the Territorial Army, plans for which we announced in March, we intend to begin raising a new battalion in the Cheshire area in 1986, which will be called 3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Cheshire Regiment. This will be based on two existing companies of 2nd Battalion Mercian Volunteers at Ellesmere Port and Stockport. A headquarters for the new battalion will be raised initially at Northwich and will move to Runcorn. A new company will be raised at Macclesfield and the detachment of B Company, 2nd Battalion Mercian Volunteers at Crewe will expand and become D Company of the new battalion. We also plan to expand 207 (Manchester) general hospital, Royal Army Medical Corps (Volunteers), which recruits partly in Macclesfield, by about 100 posts. In addition, we intend to raise new home service force companies based in Warrington and Runcorn, and a platoon of a company based in Liverpool will be raised at Widnes.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the average annual training time undertaken by individuals serving in the Territorial Army.

Mr. Lee: During the training year 1983-84 the average number of training days undertaken by the whole of the Territorial Army was 35·9 per man.

NATO

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy to seek to ensure that public statements made by, and the military doctrine of, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation reflect its character as a defensive alliance.

Mr. Lee: NATO's public statements, such as its communiqués, and NATO military planning already reflect the defensive nature of the Alliance.

Service Personnel (Industrial Disputes)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Defence why he does not give guidelines to service men on their off-duty involvement in industrial disputes such as the current miners' dispute.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing further to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member on 11 December, at column 409.

FH70 Programme

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for defence if any companies involved in the Federal Republic of Germany are experiencing difficulties in reaching production deadlines in the FH70 programme.

Mr. Butler: Not that I am aware.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs are expected to be lost, both directly and indirectly, as a result of giving the FH70 order to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Butler: The current order for FH70 ammunition to meet British Army requirements has, in accordance with international working agreements, been allocated to the Federal Republic of Germany. Had this work been awarded in full to the ROFs, in contravention of the relevant memorandum of understanding, it is estimated that it would have given rise to 640 man years of work. It is not possible to estimate the amount of any further work which this would have produced elsewhere.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will indicate how much work has been received by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Federal Republic of Germany and *(c)* the Republic of Italy under the agreement concerning the FH70 programme.

Mr. Butler: The latest trilaterally agreed position is as follows:

	Value of work £ million	Percentage of total Per cent.	Workshares entitlement Per cent.
UK industry	204	38·1	36·3
FRG industry	185	34·7	36·3
Italian industry	145	27·2	27·4
	534	100	100

Crown Proceedings Act 1947

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the operation of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Mr. Lee: Section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 is currently under review.

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1947 section 10 of the Crown Protection Act 1947 has been invoked.

Mr. Lee: Section 10 of the Crown Protection Act 1947 applies to all cases of death or injury to members of the armed forces occurring in the circumstances described in the section and where DHSS certifies that the relevant incident or circumstance is regarded as attributable to service. Available records do not allow us to determine the total numbers concerned since 1947.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 11 December, *Official Report*, columns *432-33*, if he will list the course and position of the General Belgrano on all those occasions when it was reported to the Flag Officer Submarines at Northwood.

Mr. Heseltine: I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in her letter to the hon. Member on 19 September.

Commercial Shipping (Hire)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Vote and subhead under which his Department's costs for the hire of commercial shipping is included.

Mr. Lee: Expenditure on the chartering or hiring of commercial shipping is borne on Class I, Vote 1, subheads, E1, E2, F4, H1, I1 and L6 and Class I, Vote 2, subhead F1, depending on the purpose for which it is required. Except for F4 these subheads also cover other forms of expenditure.

United States Nuclear Bases

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is aware of the current rules of engagement which are operative for United States service men guarding United States nuclear bases.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Nuclear Installations

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the rules of engagement issued to soldiers guarding nuclear installations.

Mr. Lee: No. The guidance issued to armed service men is classified.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the rules of engagement for soldiers guarding nuclear establishments were last changed; and if he is planning any changes in the immediate future.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) on 3 November 1983, at column 1004. No changes are planned.

Eastern Europe (Deep Targets)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the event of conflict in central Europe, ministerial authorisation is needed before conventional forces can be used against deep targets in eastern Europe.

Mr. Lee: Yes. Overall political control of military activity is a fundamental principle of Alliance policy.

38 REME Workshop, Chilwell

Mr. Lester asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give an up-to-date costing for the installation of replacement test facilities at Boughton and Bicester following the proposed closure of 38 REME workshop at Chilwell.

Mr. Lee: Both during the period of consultation with the work force and trade unions — following the announcement on 28 June of our proposals for restructuring the REME static workshops in the United Kingdom — and prior to that date, we were not in a position to make detailed surveys and seek tenders for re-siting equipment and modifying existing workshop facilities. The published cost figure of £2½ million for moving equipments from Chilwell and Newark workshops and relocating or reproviding them at Bicester, Bovington, Donnington or Old Dalby workshops had therefore to be based on in-house estimating. We are now producing detailed costings as we are able to proceed with substantive planning. Although I would not expect these to vary significantly from the original estimate, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend in due course to let him know the results.

Written Answers

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his practice personally to sign all written answers he gives to hon. Members.

Mr. Butler: In common with all Ministers in this Department, it is the practice of my right hon. Friend to approve personally the terms of all written answers given by him in reply to the questions from hon. Members.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety (Industrial Plants)

Mr. Watson asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further action he proposes to control the potential hazards to the health and safety of workers and the public arising from major industrial plants.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has today laid before the House the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984, S.I. No. 1902, which implement the European Community directive on the control of major accident hazards, known as the Seveso directive. These new regulations are part of a framework of controls for industrial major hazards which has been developed in Great Britain over the past decade by the Health and Safety Commission, assisted by its advisory committee on major hazards, and Departments with responsibility for town and country planning. These new controls, which will be enforced by the Health and Safety

Executive, aim further to reduce the likelihood of major industrial accidents and to minimise the consequences of any incident. Their provisions will protect both people and the environment.

The main impact of these regulations in Great Britain will be on larger chemical and petro-chemical installations handling more than specified amounts of certain flammable, explosive or toxic substances. Such installations will be required to notify the Health and Safety Executive of details of their activities and to submit a written report, or safety case, about their operations. They must also prepare adequate emergency plans for use on their sites and tell the people who live nearby, and who might be affected by an accident, about the nature of the hazard and what to do if an accident did occur. The local (county) authorities are similarly required to prepare an emergency plan to deal with any off-site consequence. Finally, any major accidents which occur must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive which will report them, in turn, to the European Commission for the mutual benefit of all member states.

These regulations implement a European directive which is also being put into practice in all the other member states of the Community. The co-operation between member states, in which Great Britain is playing a full part, should help to share knowledge and experience so that our countries can reap the benefits of advanced, technological industries without running undue or unnecessary risks.

Labour Statistics

15. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been unemployed for over 12 months; and what was the comparable figure for May 1979.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 11 October 1984 the number of claimants in the United Kingdom who had been unemployed for over one year was 1,276,883. The corresponding figure for April 1979 was 366,711, although this relates to registrants at jobcentres and is not directly comparable. The May 1979 figure is not available.

16. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for the number of men and women, above retirement age, who are in work.

Mr. Alan Clark: The labour force survey shows that there were 264,000 men and 517,000 women above retirement age in work in Great Britain in the second quarter of 1983.

20. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons have reached pensionable age over the past five years; how many school leavers have become available for employment over the same period; and what have been the implications for the labour market.

Mr. Alan Clark: Between 1978 and 1983, 2·9 million people reached pensionable age in Great Britain. Over the same period 3·3 million people left school not intending to go into further full-time education.

These were two of the factors which contributed to a growth of a quarter of a million in the labour force over that period.

24. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest number of unemployed in the United Kingdom.

39. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest level of unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 8 November 1984 the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,222,586.

29. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those industries in which there has been most growth in jobs in the latest 12-month period for which statistics are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The industries in which there was the greatest numerical increase in employees in employment in Great Britain between June 1983 and June 1984 are as follows:

Activity Heading of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification

Food retailing (AH 6410)
Social welfare, charitable and community services (AH 9611)
Hotel trade (AH 6650)
Sport and other recreational services (AH 9791)
Research and development (AH 9400)
Public houses and bars (AH 6620)
Banking and bill-discounting (AH 8140)

49. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will place in the Library a list of all redundancies and job losses, relating to all firms and industries, on a weekly basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on confirmed redundancies is published monthly in tables 2.30 (by region) and 2.31 (by industry) of the labour market data section of *Employment Gazette;* copies of which are available in the Library. Other regularly produced unpublished analyses, by industry within region, are placed in the Library.

The extra costs of compiling weekly information cannot be justified.

The names of firms suffering redundancies cannot be disclosed, as this information is treated in confidence by the Department.

52. **Mr. Beggs** asked the Secretary of State for Employment which region of the United Kingdom currently has the highest level of unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 8 November 1984 there were 121,025 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland with a corresponding unemployment rate of 20·9 per cent., which is higher than for all other regions of the United Kingdom.

53. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his current estimate of the number and rate of unemployed in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 8 November 1984 there were 20,238 unemployed claimants in the city of Leicester. Travel-to-work areas are the smallest areas for which unemployment rates are calculated. The corresponding figure for the Leicester travel-to-work area was 27,458, representing an unemployment rate of 11·0 per cent.

Skillcentres

17. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Employment following the recent meeting of the Manpower Services Commission, if he will make a statement on the future of skillcentres.

25. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of skillcentres.

Mr. Tom King: Proposals for updating and streamlining the skillcentre network are currently being considered by the Manpower Services Commission and I have yet to receive the commission's advice.

40. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average percentage of unemployment in the areas in which it is proposed to close skillcentres; and how this compares with the average percentage in areas where skillcentres are to remain.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The average unemployment rate in the travel-to-work areas in which it is proposed to close skillcentres was 13·2 per cent. at 8 November 1984. The corresponding figure for the areas where skillcentres are to remain was 13·1 per cent.

68. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations he has had recently on the closure of skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission, which has represented on it employers, trade unions, local authority and education interests, is considering proposals for the future of the skillcentre network. We have yet to receive the commission's advice.

Jobcentres

18. **Mr. Galley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the Manpower Services Commission's proposals for the size of the jobcentre network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Four thousand organisations and individuals were consulted on the proposals for the jobcentre network. Replies were received from almost 3,000, including Members of Parliament, area manpower boards, local authorities, trade unions, trades councils, and Manpower Services Commission staff and their representatives.

51. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment service jobs will be lost as a result of the Manpower Services Commission's plans to change the jobcentre network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The proposals for a revised jobcentre network involve a staff reduction of 530 posts over three years.

A further 450 posts will be saved over the same period as a result of the introduction into jobcentres of a more efficient computerised system for handling job vacancies.

Disabled Persons

19. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Manpower Services Commission's code of good practice on the employment of disabled people.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Manpower Services Commission's code of good practice on the employment of disabled people was formally launched by the Prime Minister on 14 November and copies have been placed in the Library.

The Government have welcomed and endorsed the code; my right hon. Friend has written to 150 leading companies enclosing a video about the code; and has received a most encouraging response. We believe that the code will be important in ensuring that the abilities of disabled people are recognised and fully utilised.

70. **Mr. Ron Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if the Government intend to promote legislation to make discrimination in employment against disabled persons illegal.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

21. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are very encouraged by the continued success of the enterprise allowance scheme, which has so far helped 60,000 unemployed people start their own business.

42. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many places will be available on the enterprise allowance scheme in 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: As my right hon. Friend announced on 12 November, at columns 445-46, the number of places available on the enterprise allowance scheme will be increased by 25 per cent. in 1985-86 and will offer over 62,000 unemployed people the chance to start their own business.

46. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs have been created by businesses started under the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) earlier today.

Equal Opportunities Commission

22. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his meeting with Lady Platt, the chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, on Tuesday 4 December.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I met Lady Platt on 4 December to discuss the change from 1 October in the eligibility criteria for the community programme. I explained why we think those long-term unemployed people most in need should have priority for available places on the programme, and I undertook to consider further the concerns which Lady PLatt raised with me.

Health and Safety Commission and Executive

23. **Mr. William Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to change the role of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The functions and responsibilities of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive are set out in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. We have no plans to change them.

Home Workers

26. **Mr. Prescott** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's estimate of the

numbers of home workers; if he is satisfied with their employment conditions; and when the Home Working Advisory Committee last gave him any advice.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are estimated to be 285,000 people working at home in the United Kingdom. Their conditions of employment is one of the areas under scrutiny in the current programme of research into home working. The Home Working Advisory Committee last met in January 1979.

67. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to improve the enforcement of minimum pay rates for home workers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The current arrangements for checking the pay of home workers covered by wages councils are considered to be adequate. Last year 3 per cent. of those whose pay was checked were found to be paid less than the legal minimum.

Wages Inspectorate

27. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are employed by the Wages Inspectorate at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 3 September 1984 the Wages Inspectorate had a total of 222 staff in its 15 divisional offices.

Apprenticeships

28. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will increase the availability of assistance to employers for taking on apprentices to a level such that any young person who wishes to take a formal apprenticeship can get as much financial support for the duration of the apprenticeship as he or she would get if employed on Manpower Services Commission job creation schemes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Widespread support for the first year of recognised apprentice training is already provided by the Government under the youth training scheme.

Responsibility for the level of recruitment of apprentices and for training beyond the first year rests with employers, as set out in the White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135).

Industrial Relations

30. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further proposals he has for legislation within industrial relations.

43. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to restrict the right to strike in essential services.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have no definite plans for further legislation on industrial relations at this stage. The strike ballot provisions of the Trade Union Act have been in force only since 26 September and the other two parts of that Act will come into effect during 1985. We shall, however, be considering what further steps might usefully be taken both to deal with the special problems of industrial action in essential services and more generally.

Departmental Costs

31. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Mr. Tom King: The plans to improve control of the Department's running costs were set out in the White Paper on financial management in Government Departments, which was published in July 1984 (Cmnd. 9297). Substantial progress has been made in implementing the Department's programme, including new arrangements for the involvement of myself and the other Ministers in the final stages of the review. I also receive periodic reports from the Manpower Services Commission and Health and Safety Commission on progress in implementing the financial management initiative and have discussed this with their chairmen.

Information Technology Centres

32. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the information technology centres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The arrangements for information technology centres which I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) on 7 November 1984, at columns 2-3, should encourage centres to consolidate and widen their involvement in business generation and training activities.

Employees (Assaults)

33. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action the Health and Safety Executive is currently taking to deal with the problem of assaults suffered by employees in the course of their work.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Health and Safety Executive has recently established a committee with interested parties and departments to consider existing measures taken by employers and possible future measures to combat the problem of violence to employees at the workplace from members of the public. The committee in particular aims to stimulate joint consideration of the problem by employers and unions in the sectors most affected. As a result, the problem is now being examined by the Health and Safety Commission's joint advisory committees on railways, education and the National Health Service; and the Department of Transport has convened a special working group to consider the problem in road passenger transport.

Wages Councils

34. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he makes of the effect of wages councils on employment in the industries covered.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are continuing to consider evidence and opinion on this subject.

44. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees are covered by wages councils at the latest available date.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The estimated number is 2·7 million.

58. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to abolish the wages councils.

Mr. Evenett asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he now has any plans to abolish the wages councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I would refer my hon. Friends to my hon. Friend's reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 12 December 1984, at columns, 496-97.

Community Programme

35. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many long-term unemployed people have become ineligible for community programme schemes since 1 October as a result of not being in receipt of benefit.

37. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Employment why the Manpower Services Commission is restricting community programme places to those dependent on benefits.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 9 November at columns 27-28.

38. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the recent changes in community programme regulations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We have received some 200 letters concerned with the change to the eligibility criteria for the community programme. I have also met Lady Platt, chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) earlier today.

56. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to expand the numbers of people within the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply by my right hon. Friend on 30 July, at columns 121-22.

59. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the progress of the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The community programme continues to make good progress. At the end of October some 126,000 people were taking part.

65. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about training in the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend announced on 30 July, at column 122, the Government's decision that, as part of the adult training strategy, participation in the community programme, which provides temporary jobs for long-term unemployed people, would be linked with short courses of work preparation and basic skills training. The Manpower Services Commission has begun to set up such courses and we anticipate that some 50,000 community programme clients annually are likely to benefit when the arrangements are fully developed.

Youth Training

36. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he will next meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss youth training.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We frequently discuss training, including youth training, with representatives of the Confederation of British Industry.

Youth Training Scheme

41. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Employment how much the Government are currently spending on the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The estimate provision for expenditure on youth training in 1984-85 is £801·4 million.

47. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement on the level of take-up of the youth training scheme at the end of November 1984.

55. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the take-up of the youth training scheme since September.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There were about 327,000 entrants to the youth training scheme between the beginning of April and the end of November this year, including some 70,000 entrants since the end of September. I am most encouraged by the response to the scheme in its second year, which shows that young people recognise the advantages of participating in a high quality training programme.

The continuing tremendous support from employers and other sponsors means that there will be more than sufficient places to meet the needs of all eligible youngsters in the second year.

57. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the level of training allowance which would have been paid to trainees on the youth training scheme if that allowance had been increased since April 1978 by either the rise in the retail price index or the rise in average industrial earnings.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The youth training scheme did not come into operation until April 1983. Between April 1978 and October 1984 the general index of retail prices increased by 83·8 per cent., and between April 1978 and September 1984 the average earnings index increased by 105·1 per cent. If the youth opportunities programme allowance of £19·50 in April 1978 had been increased by the former amount, it would now be £35·84 and by the latter it would now be £39·99.

Young Persons (Wages)

45. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will take steps to prevent wages councils deciding the minimum wages of young people.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government are considering whether changes should be made to the Wages Councils Act. At present, we are prevented from removing young people from scope by obligations under International Labour Convention 26.

Adult Training

48. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that the provision of adult training responds to employers' needs.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As part of the Government's adult training strategy the resources available to the Manpower Services Commission are being directed to support training which is adaptable and responsive to employers' needs and which stimulates employers' own efforts. For example, steps have been taken to ensure that the commission's programme of skill supply training for unemployed people relates closely to known employment needs. The commission is also piloting some new pump-priming grant schemes for employers designed to contribute towards the costs of identifying employers' needs, upgrading and updating the skills of employees and training new recruits in skills which are in short supply locally. We are also funding a local collaborative projects programme jointly with the Education Departments, to help employers and training providers to work together to define training needs and explore possible ways of meeting them.

Industrial Disputes (Lost Working Days)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's latest figures for the number of days lost through industrial disputes this year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is provisionally estimated that in the first 10 months of this year 18·8 million working days have been lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes in the United Kingdom. About 80 per cent. were lost in the mining dispute.

Job Creation

54. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to reduce unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 13 December 1984, at column 557.

Professional and Executive Recruitment Service

60. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the Professional and Executive Recruitment Service; and whether he has any plans to privatise it.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Professional and Executive Recruitment was put on to a full cost recovery basis from 1 April 1983. The service met its self-financing objective for the 1983-84 financial year and current indications are that this year's objective will also be met. I am pleased to say that the service therefore now operates at no cost to the taxpayer. There are no plans for the moment to change the basis of operation of the service, but its future is being kept under review.

Robotics and Microprocessor Controls

61. **Mr. Wood** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what conclusions were reached by the recent study by Her Majesty's Factories Inspectorate of the safety aspects of robotics and microprocessor controls.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The study of the prevention of risks in the use of microprocessor controls and robotics is continuing. I am advised by the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission that the Health and Safety Executive is to issue guidance documents on both topics. A guidance document on the safeguarding of industrial robotics is being prepared. A draft will be circulated to those in industry with an interest in the subject. Their views will be taken into account before the guidance is published. A draft of a three part document "Guidance on the Safe Use of Programme Electronic Systems" has already been circulated to industry for comment. Publication is intended for 1985, and again the opinions expressed at the consultation stage will be taken into account. Copies of the draft have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Disabled Persons

62. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government intend to take to monitor the implementation by employers of the code of practice on the employment of disabled persons.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about employers' first impressions of the code will be obtained in the first half of 1985. This will be followed by an in-depth evaluation of the code, probably in two to three years' time, when employers will have had time to adjust their policies and practices, where necessary, to its guidance.

Coal Industry Dispute

63. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will seek a meeting with the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress to consider fresh conciliation measures to settle the dispute in the mining industry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy met the general secretary and other representatives of the Trades Union Congress on 14 December. The Government wish to see an early and constructive settlement to this dispute, but until the NUM shows a genuine desire to reach such a settlement we cannot see any fresh conciliation attempts being successful.

64. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the effect on employment of the industrial dispute in parts of the coal industry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All strikes put employment at risk. In the short term output is lost and orders go to competitors. In the longer term customer confidence may be irreparably damaged. Apart from the effects on the industry itself, the coal dispute is affecting employment throughout the economy, partly because of its general effects on interest rates and market confidence.

The individual causes of changes in the level of employment cannot be identified in the Department's statistics. However, the Association of British Mining Equipment Companies has estimated that if the dispute continues into next year, the work force employed by its members and their subcontractors will have been substantially reduced through redundancies and short-time working.

Sir Hector Monro asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Scotland, and in which travel-to-work areas, have lost employment as a result of the miners' strike.

Mr. Alan Clark: All strikes put employment at risk. In the short term, output is lost and orders go to competitors. In the longer term customer confidence may be irreparably damaged. Apart from the effects on the industry itself, the coal dispute is affecting employment throughout the economy, partly because of its general effects on interest rates and market confidence.

However, the individual causes of changes in the level of employment cannot be identified in the Department's statistics and it is not possible to assess any effects particular to Scotland.

Unemployed Persons (Training)

66. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further plans he has to provide training for the unemployed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The youth training scheme is now firmly established and sufficient places are available this year for all youngsters likely to come forward.

This year about 85,000 unemployed adults are expected to enter the Manpower Services Commission's training opportunities scheme. As part of our adult training strategy, major changes are underway to make the Manpower Services Commission's adult training programmes more effective, and we plan to substantially increase to 125,000 the number of unemployed adults trained each year. In addition around 125,000 employed adults will be helped to train each year.

Young Workers Scheme

69. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the operation of the young workers scheme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since the young workers scheme started in January 1982, it has helped provide employment for over 350,000 young people at more realistic rates of pay. Some 70,000 young people are currently supported and my right hon. Friend announced on 12 November, at column 644, that the scheme is to continue until March 1986.

Closed Shop Agreements

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list instances since 1 November when and where, in accordance with employment legislation, secret ballots have been held to confirm the continuation of closed shop agreements; and what have been the results of these secret ballots.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The employment legislation imposes no specific obligation on employers to hold secret ballots on the continuation of closed shop agreements. However, if no ballot is held the effect is exactly the same as if a ballot is held and the required majority is not achieved; dismissal for non-membership of a trade union becomes automatically unfair. Details of ballots which have been reported in the press as having been held since 1 November are as follows.

It is clear that only a very small proportion of the 4 million or so employees covered by closed shops have so far been given the chance of a ballot and that the vast majority of closed shops have therefore lost all legal protection. In addition, a number of major employers—including the water authorities, the National Bus Company, United Biscuits — have terminated their closed shop agreements; and others, including British Gas, have made it clear that they are not prepared to dismiss employees on grounds of non-membership of a trade union.

Trade Union	*Employer*	*Result (for or against continuance of the closed shop)*	*Number of employees*
National Union of Public Employees	London Ambulance Service	Against	2,113
Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) Confederation of Health Service Employees General, Municipal and Boilermakers Union			
Electrical, Electronic Telecommunication and Plumbing Trade Union	Cossor Electronics (Essex)	For	695
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)	Kays Mail Order (Leeds, Bradford)	For	1,500
TGWU	Kays Mail Order (Worcester) manual employees	For	not known
	non-manual employees	Against	not known
USDAW	British Mail Order Corporation (Lancashire)	For	not known
USDAW	Rank Hovis McDougall (Leeds)	For	not known
National Graphical Association SOGAT '82	Reuters International News Agency (London)	Against	854

Trade Unions (Ballots)

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list instances of pre-strike ballots held in accordance with the Trade Union Act 1984 and the result of those ballots.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Press reports indicate that since the strike ballot provisions of the Trade Union Act 1984 came into effect on 26 September one ballot has been held as a direct result of legal proceedings brought under the Act. In that instance a majority of the union members

voting expressed their willingness to take part in industrial action. However, in three other reported cases — including Austin Rover — employers have obtained injunctions which required the trade unions concerned to desist from organising industrial action because they had failed to hold ballots in accordance with the Act.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Employment which trade unions have informed his Department of their acceptance of public money for postal ballots.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am informed by the Certification Officer that 26 trade unions have applied for public money since the inception of the funding scheme in 1980. Press reports suggest that for the first time a number of unions affiliated to the TUC are either intending to make applications for funding or are pressing the TUC to change its policy of boycotting the scheme. Unions mentioned in these reports include:

The Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, (Engineering Section)
The Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs
The Electrical Electronic Telecommunication and Plumbing Union and
The United Road Transport Union.

Trade Union (Rule Books)

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department has received about the number of trade unions which are looking at ways of bringing their rule books into line with the provisions of the Trade Union Act 1984; and if he will list them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Trade unions with political funds which intend to hold review ballots under the provisions of the 1984 Act in order to continue spending money on party political matters will need to adopt new rules for the holding of these ballots. Reports suggest that most of the 60 trade unions with political funds will choose to do so. The provisions of the 1984 Act relating to elections and ballots before industrial action place no specifc obligations on trade unions to alter their rules. However, press reports suggest that a number of trade unions are contemplating rule changes as a result of one or both of these provisions, including

The Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs
The Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (Engineering Section)
The Engineers and Managers Association
The General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union
The Union of Communication Workers
The United Road Transport Union.

The provisions of the Act concerning union elections do not come into force until 1 October 1985.

Manufacturing Industry (Statistics)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for the United Kingdom and the United States of America the increase in prices and earnings in manufacturing, taking account of changes in working hours, over the past 12 months together with the increase in take-home pay as a result of changes in taxation; whether he will include figures showing hours worked and the change in unit labour costs in both cases; and if he will compare the latest monthly change in the employment figures in the two countries for manufacturing and for other industries.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest information for comparable periods is as follows:

	Percentage change
(a) Percentage change in retail prices in the 12 months to October 1984	
United Kingdom (Retail Prices Index)	+5·0
United States (Consumer Price Index)	+4·2
(b) Percentage change in average gross hourly earnings in manufacturing industries in the 12 months to September 1984	
Great Britain (estimated underlying increase)*	About 8·25
United States (production workers)	3·7
(c) Percentage change in average weekly hours in manufacturing industries (seasonally adjusted) in the 12 months to September 1984	
Great Britain (operatives)	+0·3
United States (production workers)	−0·5
(d) Percentage change in manufacturing unit wage and salary costs in the 12 months to August 1984	
United Kingdom	+5·1
United States	+0·7

	Manufacturing†	*Other industries and services*
(e) Change in employees in employment between March and June 1984 (thousands, seasonally adjusted)		
Great Britain	+3	+7
United States (non agricultural payrolls)	+163	+914

* The estimated underlying increase for Great Britain is based on the underlying increase in average weekly earnings in manufacturing industries of 8·75 per cent. and the information on average weekly hours of operatives.

† The change between August and September, available only for manufacturing employees, was +13 thousand in Great Britain and −124 thousand in the United States.

Sources:

Employment Gazette (November 1984) and *OECD Main Economic Indicators* (November 1984).

Changes in taxation are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Industrial Training Associations

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are taken by the Manpower Services Commission to liaise with those industrial training associations which have replaced training boards, now abolished, over matters relating to training content, work place supervision, and levy on grant arrangements; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission maintains contact with training organisations, which replaced industrial training boards, through appointed liaison officers, and by regular provision of information on training issues, national training policies and publicly-funded training assistance. These contacts also provide opportunities for consultation and discussion. Such bodies of course do not have a statutory right to impose levy on their members.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether Manpower Services Commission area boards have introduced arrangements to pay grants

direct to individual firms, thereby bypassing industrial training associations; and whether he will discuss with the chairman whether the practice should continue.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As set out in the White Paper, "Training For Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135), the adult training strategy aims to improve and strengthen opportunities for meeting the needs of local industry and commerce. This will include provision of publicly funded local training grants available via Manpower Services Commission area offices. A limited number of pilot schemes are being run in the 1984-85 financial year.

Grant schemes which meet nationally identified priorities, such as computer and other priority skills training, continue to be available to employers through industry training organisations. In cases where companies approaching Manpower Services Commission area offices for local grant aid appear eligible for such national grants, they are first invited to contact the appropriate industry training organisation.

Training Grants

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Manpower Services Commission has any proposals currently under consideration to disqualify companies employing over 200 people from any training grants; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No such proposals are under consideration. The Manpower Services Commission has a number of schemes which are directly aimed at assisting the creation and growth of new firms and therefore assist only small firms. While there are not any grant schemes that disqualify companies of a particular size, there are conditions in a number of schemes that give priority to small firms.

New Training Initiative

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the air transport and travel industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(2) if he will report, for each region and each training year 1979-80 to 1984-85, on the level of recruitment to first-year apprentice training in the carpet industry, the ceramics, glass and mineral products industry, the chemical and allied products industry, the cotton and allied textiles industry, the furniture and timber industry, the iron and steel industry, the printing and publishing industry, the rubber and plastics industry, the shipbuilding industry and the wool, jute and flax industry, respectively.

(3) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the shipbuilding industry industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(4) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the wool, jute and flax industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(5) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the carpet industry industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(6) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the man-made fibres industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(7) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the printing and publishing industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(8) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the iron and steel industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(9) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the knitting, lace and net industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(10) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the furniture and timber industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(11) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the hotel and catering industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(12) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the food, drink and tobacco industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(13) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the distributive industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(14) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the cotton and allied textiles industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(15) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the chemical and allied products industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(16) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the clothing and allied products industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

(17) if he will detail the training arrangements which replaced the ceramics, glass and mineral products industrial training board and make a statement concerning progress towards the objectives of the new training initiative in that sector;

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall write to the hon. Member over the recess and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pension Funds

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost in the present and in the next financial year of tax relief to pension funds.

Mr. Moore: Measurement of the revenue cost of tax reliefs available to occupational pension schemes and contributors depends upon the choice of an alternative tax regime against which the present arrangements are to be

compared. The Inland Revenue's consultative paper of September 1983 "Cost of tax reliefs for pension schemes: appropriate statistical approach" set out five possible bases for such a comparison. At 1984-85 levels, the revenue cost of reliefs under these five approaches would range from £900 million to £3,400 million. I regret that it is not possible to provide figures for 1985-86.

GDP and Consumer Spending

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figures for gross domestic product and consumer spending at 1980 prices and current prices for each of the years 1978 to 1983, and the latest available estimates for 1984.

Mr. Peter Rees: Current and constant price figures for consumers' expenditure and gross domestic product to the end of 1983 were published in the 1984 edition of "United Kingdom National Accounts". The Government's latest forecasts for gross domestic product and consumers' expenditure at constant prices in 1984 were published in the autumn statement.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the figures for total public expenditure, including debt interest and before deducting the proceeds of asset sales, for each of the years from 1978-79 to 1983-84, with the estimated figures for 1984-85 and 1985-86, all at 1980 prices.

Mr. Peter Rees: The figures requested are:

	£ billion (1980 cost terms)
1979-80	101·0
1980-81	102·0
1981-82	105·3
1982-83	107·6
1983-84	109·2
1984-85	111·4
1985-86	110·6

These figures represent the public expenditure planning total and general government gross debt interest with receipts from the sales of special and fixed assets added back, deflated to 1980 cost terms. Figures for 1978-79 are not available on a consistent definition.

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figures at constant prices for total gross public capital expenditure, before deducting the proceeds of asset sales, for each of the years 1973-74, 1978-79 to 1983-84, and the latest estimates for 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Peter Rees: The latest available figures for total gross public sector capital spending were published in table 1.13 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1984-85 to 1986-87" (Cmnd. 9143). In 1982-83 cost terms they were:

	£ billion
1978-79	21·8
1979-80	22·0
1980-81	21·6
1981-82	20·7
1982-83	21·4
1983-84	22·2
1984-85	21·7

These figures are expressed before deducting the proceeds of asset sales and also include other adjustments to the public expenditure planning total as explained in the footnotes to the published table.

Figures for 1973-74 and 1985-86 are not available on consistent definitions. Revised figures for recent years to 1985-86 will be published in the next public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in considering the job creation effects of various forms of public expenditure, what estimate he uses of *(a)* the gross cost in public expenditure terms and *(b)* the net cost in public sector borrowing requirement terms of the job creation effects of home improvement grants.

Mr. Peter Rees: There are a number of technical difficulties in making a precise estimate of the cost per job resulting from various public expenditure programmes. However, in broad terms, the net cost per net person off the employment register of public expenditure on home improvement grants is estimated to be more than 10 times that of the average such net cost for special employment measures.

Manufacturing Employment

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the peak employment in manufacturing in the United Kingdom since 1960 compared to the present; and what was the peak, and what is the present employment, in manufacturing in other industrial countries.

Mr. Peter Rees: Index numbers for the employed labour force in United Kingdom manufacturing from 1960 to the present are provided in the annual supplement of *Economic Trends* (1984 edition) and in the November 1984 edition of *Economic Trends*. Similar estimates for other industrial countries can be found in the OECDs "Main Economic Indicators".

Taxpayers (Tourism)

Mr. Hirst asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the present number of self-employed taxpayers whose income wholly or principally arises from tourist-related activities.

Mr. Moore: I regret that this information is not available, as such taxpayers are not identified by the occupational classification used when the statistics are collected.

Pay and Jobs (Links)

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what links the Treasury model assumes between real wages or total real employment costs and total employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: The estimate of the relationship between real wages and employment, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given the House on 30 October at column 1183, was based on a

survey of academic studies and on the results of simulations of the Treasury model. Details of the evidence, including the simulation results, will be published in the new year.

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the link between total employment costs and total employment in terms of jobs created or lost for decreases or increases in such costs.

Mr. Peter Rees: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already given the House his estimate of the additional jobs that would result, over a period of years, if real wages had been held constant between 1981 and 1984—30 October, column 1183. It was based on evidence that a sustained 1 per cent. fall in the average level of real employment costs will, in time, lead to an increase of between 0·5 and 1 per cent. in employment.

EC (Contributions)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the sum which the United Kingdom will have paid to the Common Market, net of any repayments, during the calendar year 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

EC (Refund)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the refund which the United Kingdom has secured in discussion within the Council of Ministers of £600 million in respect of the year 1985 is subject, before actual payment, to the approval of the Common Market Assembly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Fontainebleau European Council of Heads of State and Government agreed that the United Kingdom should receive in 1985 a refund of 1,000 million ecu in respect of its excessive budgetary burden in 1984. The Council agreed that this should be paid by deduction from the United Kingdom's VAT share in 1985. The payment will not be dependent on the approval of the European Parliament.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the limit on the sum of total expenditure which the Common Market Council of Ministers will, by qualified majority, be able to determine when the additional own resources and budgetary restraint mechanism come into effect.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Woodcock asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the effect of the introduction of value added tax on the fish and chip business; and whether there are any plans to alter the rate of value added tax on hot-take away food.

Mr. Hayhoe: Treasury Ministers continue to receive letters and the Hot Take-Away Action Group has also recently made further representations. As regards the second part of the question, I cannot anticipate the Budget.

Privatisation (Fees and Commissions)

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* updated figures for fees paid, including fees to auditors in respect of the first share issues for Amersham International Ltd., Associated British Ports, British Aerospace, British Railways Board Hotels, Britoil, Cable and Wireless and the National Freight Corporation and *(b)* all the fees and commissions paid to primary underwriters, sub-underwriters, financial advisers, legal advisers, auditors and stockbrokers in respect of the second Cable and Wireless issue, the second Associated British Ports issue, Enterprise Oil, Sealink, Jaguar, British Telecom and the 1979 and 1983 BP issues; and if he will name each firm concerned.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Non-residents (Taxation)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to authorise the issue of a consultative document covering the taxation of non-residents operating in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is proposed that a consultative document on the taxation of non-residents operating in the United Kingdom will be issued next year. However, in advance of consultation on the wider issues, I have authorised the Inland Revenue to publish today a consultative paper on the tax treatment of non-resident investors who use the services of United Kingdom investment managers. Comments are invited by 1 February 1985.

I have arranged to have copies of the document placed in the Library of the House.

Customs Controls (Staff)

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he is making to the claim by the Customs and Excise Council of Civil Service Unions for 500 additional staff for the operation of customs controls.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have written to the secretary of the council as follows:

"When you and your Trade Union Side colleagues came to see me on 21 November, and I am grateful for the constructive points you made, I promised to report our discussion to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which I have done, and then to let you have a written reply to your claim.

Government policy is that Civil Service manpower should match the needs of the work to be done. This means that staffing levels are decided only after careful consideration of the number of staff required to do the necessary work and to achieve the required results. This approach is applied to Customs and Excise work as it is to the generality of Government Departments.

The approach does not, of course, work in one direction only. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have been concerned to ensure that, taking full account of the scope for efficiency and other savings, Customs and Excise are allocated the appropriate level of resources to undertake their essential functions. For 1985-86 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 10 October that Customs and Excise manpower would be increased by 185 posts above previous planning levels. This included 160 extra staff for customs preventive controls: the making permanent of 60 temporary posts allocated to enhance controls of both passengers and freight in 1984-85 and 100 new posts for the fight against drugs smuggling in 1985-86. These posts will be used in areas where they are most likely to yield results, for example, in increased intelligence gathering and targeted operations and in improving selective controls. Their deployment

will be the subject of formal management proposals in due course, so that there will be a proper opportunity for the Trade Union Side to make any detailed points in the context of the Civil Service Whitley machinery.

I believe your claim underrates the very considerable successes achieved by Customs and Excise against drugs smuggling in recent years. For example, in the first 10 months of this year Customs and Excise seized over 250 kilos of heroin which is a considerable increase over the 212 kilos seized in the whole of 1983 and the 40 kilos seized in 1979. Over 200 persons have been arrested in relation to heroin offences so far this year, of whom more than 60 were principals or organisers rather than mere carriers. On 4 October Customs, assisted by police, seized almost five tonnes of cannabis from a ship in the River Crouch — one of the largest-ever seizures in Britain. These achievements reflect favourably on the Customs and Excise service and on the success of the intelligence-based approach to targeted operations which account for most of the larger seizures. I do not accept the implication in your claim that increased Customs seizures derive from no more than a pro rata increase in the rate of drugs smuggling.

To sum up, the new allocation of resources reflects our determination, as part of the Government's co-ordinated strategy against drugs abuse, to reinforce Customs' efforts and to build on their successes. I assure you that I shall continue to take a close interest in Customs' assessment of the drugs smuggling situation and the results achieved. Equally, the adequacy of Customs' resources will be carefully watched and will be reviewed as part of the 1985 public expenditure survey."

Capital Allowances

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement about the consultations that have been taking place concerning the date on which capital expenditure is deemed to have been occurred for capital allowance purposes.

Mr. Lawson: The consultations announced by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary at Report stage of the Finance Bill on 11 July 1984 at column 1082 have been completed. In the light of those exchanges, I propose to bring the date on which expenditure is incurred for the purpose of capital allowances into line with the date on which it is treated as incurred for normal accountancy purposes. Broadly speaking, this will mean that allowances will be due to the purchaser of an asset on the date on which the obligation to pay arises, and at the rate prevailing on that date, which will normally be the date when title passes to him. There will, however, be a rule to prevent this basis being exploited for the purpose of artificially accelerating entitlement. The existing provisions under which allowances may in certain circumstances be available earlier (for example, in the case of stage payments or deposits) will be retained. Legislation to this effect will be included in the next Finance Bill. Where accounts for past periods have been drawn up in accordance with normal accountancy practice, the Inland Revenue will not seek to adjust them, whether or not the assessments are still open.

Pension Funds (Taxation)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, in any consideration of additional taxation of pension funds, he will take into account the possible effects on the solvency of those funds or of the institutions which have guaranteed the payment of the benefits.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. *574*]: If such a change were contemplated I should naturally give very careful consideration to all the factors involved.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have contributed to pension schemes for which income tax is reclaimable on contributions in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. *574*]: It is estimated that there are currently some 11·5 million employees contributing to occupational pension schemes and about 0·75 million people paying premiums under retirement annuity contracts. Relief from income tax is available in respect of these payments. I regret that figures for individual years are not available.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pension schemes have been in operation for each of the last five years for which figures are available, from which, under present regulations, lump sum payments would be tax-free.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984, c. 574]: Virtually all occupational pension schemes and retirement annuity contracts allow for the payment of a lump sum on retirement (within certain limits) which is tax-free under present arrangements. There is no precise definition of what constitutes a "scheme"; but the sixth survey of occupational pension schemes by the Government Actuary estimated that there were about 90,000 employee-based schemes in 1979.

Lump Sum Retirement Payments (Taxation)

Mr. Roger King asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be raised in a full year if lump sum pension entitlements were taxed.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax yield from taxing lump sum payments on retirement.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. 65]: Lump sum payments on retirement in 1984-85 are currently estimated at around £3 billion. If lump sums were brought into tax, the yield would depend, amongst other things, on the form of the tax and the rate at which it was charged.

Sterling Balances

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards official sterling balances.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *64*]: Following the 1977 Basle agreement official holders of sterling were asked to restrict their balances to working levels, but I have concluded that it is no longer appropriate to continue with a restriction which applies to one class of sterling holder only. This change does not imply any desire to influence the level of official balances, which will be determined by the market.

Coins (Abolition)

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what savings would be obtained by abolishing the penny;

(2) what annual savings would be secured by abolishing the 1p and the 2p pieces.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December, 1984, c. *64*]: The costs saved by abolishing the 1p and 2p coins using current figures would be £0·9 million and £1·2 million respectively.

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing the real value of today's 5p and 2p pieces in 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960 and 1970; and which coins at the relevant dates would have come nearest to representing these values.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *64*]: The values and nearest coins to today's 2p and 5p pieces are as follows:

November	*Value at date shown*		*Nearest coins*	
	p	*p*	*p*	*p*
1984	2	5	2	5
			Old pence	
	p	*p*	*d*	*d*
1970	0·41	1·02	1	*3
1960	0·27	0·68	*½	*1
1950	0·18	0·46	½	*1
1940	0·15	0·37	¼	1
1930	0·13	0·31	¼	*1

* Nearest single coin.

Single Parent Families

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have any proposals to enable working women who are single parents to recover income tax relief in respect of necessary payments by them to child minders and nannies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *65*]: No. Single parents already qualify for the additional personal allowance, which is worth £1,150 in 1984-85.

Nationalised Industries (Shares)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the study he conducted on the free distribution of shares in nationalised industries.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *65*]: The possibility was examined in depth in 1979 and 1980 and ruled out for reasons which still apply. Any such scheme would be extremely complex and the costs would significantly reduce the benefit that could be distributed. The work that led to these conclusions is not suitable for publication.

Caravan Sites (Taxation)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Inland Revenue has turned down any applications from owners of touring caravan pitches and third party static caravan pitches to be taxed under Schedule D clause 1 since the implementation of the Finance Act 1984.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *66*]: This information is not available centrally. Decisions on the appropriate basis of assessment in individual cases are taken at local office level.

National Insurance Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been charged income tax on their national insurance pensions before the pension has been paid because of the industrial action in the Department of Health and Social Security.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *66*]: The information on which to base an estimate of the number of persons who have been charged income tax on their national insurance pensions before the pension has been paid is not available. However, the emergency arrangements introduced by DHSS for the payment of retirement pensions during the industrial action should ensure that all pensioners receive their pensions without undue delay. If my hon. Friend is aware of any pensioner who is experiencing particular difficulty in obtaining payment of his pension, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security would be glad to look into it.

Alcoholic Beverages (Taxation)

Mr. Gardiner asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue effect per penny of reducing total tax charges, excise duty plus value added tax on beer, spirits and low, medium and high strength wines, respectively, expressed in £ million at 1985-86 prices.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *66*]: The estimated revenue losses are:

	Price reduction (duty plus consequential VAT)	*Full year net revenue cost at 1985-86 prices (£ million)*
Beer	1p per pint	90
Spirits	1p per bottle	1
Wine and Made-Wine		
low strength*	1p per bottle	5
medium and high strength†	1p per bottle	1·5

Notes:

* Less than 15 per cent. alcohol by volume.

† 15 per cent. to 18 per cent. and over 18 per cent. alcohol by volume.

Within limits the revenue estimates shown here can be scaled up to give a reasonable guide to the effects of larger duty reductions, although the margins of uncertainty become progressively larger as the size of reduction increases.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Asbestos Cement

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the quantity of asbestos cement imported into the United Kingdom for each year since 1981; and how these figures compare with the quantities imported for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Channon: Asbestos cement is not separately identified in the statistics of overseas trade.

Imports of articles of asbestos cement, cellulose-fibre cement and the like (the bulk of which is believed to have been of asbestos cement) have been as follows:

	Quantity (MT thousands)
1977	33·7
1978	41·5
1979	55·1
1980	66·9
1981	56·7
1982	61·5
1983	101·9
1984 January to October	89·3

Source: United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics, table III, SITC item 661.83

Phoenix 2

Mr. Duffy asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make a statement on the Phoenix 2 joint venture.

Mr. Butcher: Final proposals received from BSC and GKN in November are now under appraisal. My right hon. Friend intends to make a statement in due course.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many firms to date have benefited from the loan guarantee scheme;

(2) what is the total money guaranteed so far under the loan guarantee scheme;

(3) how much money the Government have received to date in premiums;

(4) what percentage of loans from the loan guarantee scheme has gone to start-up firms.

Mr. Trippier: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Trafalgar House

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there have been any cash payments to Trafalgar House, directly or indirectly, in respect of its purchase of Scott-Lithgow since the answer of 9 April, *Official Report*, column 19; and whether any additional payments are now anticipated.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the right hon. Member as soon as possible.

Exchange Risk Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the exchange risk guarantee scheme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry announced on 3 November 1983 that the exchange risk guarantee scheme was being extended until 31 December 1984.

The scheme provides exchange risk cover for loans advanced by the European Investment Bank and the European Coal and Steel Community, mainly to firms in the assisted areas. The Government have decided to extend this part of the scheme until 31 March 1985 to enable its future to be reviewed in the light of the changes in regional industrial policy that I announced to the House on 28 November.

The scheme also provides exchange risk cover for lending to small firms under the new community instrument. The Government have now concluded that taking account of rising costs and the availability of alternative sources of finance, this cover outside the assisted areas should come to an end on 31 December 1984. Suitable transitional arrangements will be worked out with the new Community instrument's agents.

I shall make a further statement when the Government have completed their review of cover for the lending of the European Investment Bank and European Coal and Steel Community.

Norton Villiers Triumph Ltd.

Mr. Hayward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on the negotiations to sell the Government's shareholding in Norton Villiers Triumph Ltd.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am pleased to report that negotiations have now been completed and the Department's remaining shareholding of 1 million A and 1·372 million B preference shares in Norton Villiers Triumph Ltd. have been sold to Manganese Bronze Holdings plc for a consideration of £0·375 million.

Shipbuilding Redundancy Payments Scheme

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to extend the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme beyond its present expiry date of 30 June 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes. The Government will shortly introduce a Bill to extend the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme, and the parallel scheme for Northern Ireland, on the same terms as at present. The extension will be for a final period of 18 months ending on 31 December 1986.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Sir. David Price asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how successful international contributions to Ethiopian hunger relief have been to date; how far these contributions have reached the starving people concerned; what more is required of the international community to stave off famine in Ethiopia; and what more the United Kingdom proposes to do.

Mr. Raison: Contributions made by the international community and the public are having a definite impact, as I saw on my recent visit. Food aid shipments from present pledges now look sufficient until the end of February, and there is more to come. I believe the vast bulk of these contributions have reached those in the greatest need, though it is difficult to supply the areas where civil strife continues. We expect help to be needed until the end of 1985, but the assessment of what is required will have to be done primarily by Mr. Jansson, the United Nations special co-ordinator. We will decide what more we should do, alone or through the European Community and other agencies, in the light of his reports.

Philippines

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Commonwealth Development Corporation has decided on any additional investment in the Philippines.

Mr. Raison: The proposed project at Loreto, in which CDC were interested, was dependent on road access, the finance for which has not been forthcoming. CDC is therefore proceeding no further with the project at the present time. The CDC has no other plans for new projects in the Philippines.

TRANSPORT

M25 Motorway (Accident)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in his examination of data about the M25 disaster, he will inquire into *(a)* the number of police cars deployed at the time and *(b)* whether the road signals were working and were conveying the appropriate information.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 12 December 1984 at column *528*.

Railway Investment

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport what sums of public money have been invested in the railways in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. David Mitchell: Investment by the British Railways Board is shown in the table. Railways in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

£ million—cash prices
£ million—(1984 prices)

Year	*Expenditure on Capital and Revenue Investment*		*Expenditure on Continuous Welded Rail*		*Total*	
1974	106	(354)	42	(140)	148	(494)
1975	166	(435)	50	(131)	216	(566)
1976	192	(438)	47	(107)	239	(545)
1977	204	(408)	55	(110)	259	(518)
1978	235	(423)	70	(126)	305	(549)
1979	287	(451)	69	(108)	356	(559)
1980	333	(436)	82	(107)	415	(543)
1981	308	(363)	89	(105)	397	(468)
1982	251	(276)	77	(85)	328	(361)
1983	276	(290)	105	(110)	381	(400)

Note:
Figures for 1974, 1982 and 1983 have been provided by the British Railways Board. Figures for 1975 to 1981 have been derived from table 8.1 of the "Report of the Review of Railway Finances (Vol. 1), 1983." Figures are converted to 1984 prices using the GDP market price deflator.

Motorway Warning Signs

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct officials responsible for motorway signs to introduce immediately a temporary high visibility sign system on motorways showing recent accidents and the number of fatalities at the site of such accidents to remind motorists of the dangers.

Mrs. Chalker: No. Motorways generally are much safer than other roads and such signs would be distracting.

Speed Limits

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of accidents on non-built up roads with *(a)* speed limits of 60 mph and *(b)* speed limits of 70 mph in each case where there is no street lighting.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1983 the total costs of accidents in darkness on unlit non-built up roads with a speed limit of 60 mph is estimated at about £200 million. The equivalent figure for such roads with a 70 mph speed limit is £44 million.

These figures comprise resource costs and an allowance for pain, grief and suffering.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of non-built up roads come under his jurisdiction; and if he will give the figures for those with speed limits of 50 mph, 60 mph and 70 mph respectively.

Mrs. Chalker: The proportion of non-built up roads in England that are under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State for Transport was 6·2 per cent. at 1 April 1984.

Of these roads 1·5 per cent. had a speed limit of 50 mph, 49·5 per cent. had a speed limit of 60 mph and 49 per cent. had a speed limit of 70 mph.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the cost of accidents on non-built up roads with a speed limit of 50 mph where there is no street lighting.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1983 the total cost of accidents in darkness on unlit non-built up roads with a speed limit of 50 mph is estimated at about £3 million.

The figure comprises resource costs and an allowance for pain, grief and suffering.

Roads (Lighting)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the reduction in accidents which would arise from the installation of lighting on the unlit non-built up roads with a 50 mph speed limit.

Mrs. Chalker: The only research in this area relating specifically to roads with a 50 mph speed limit gave an inconclusive result. A copy of the research report, TRRL Report LR 586, is in the Library.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the likely reduction in accident costs should lighting be installed on the unlit sections of non-built-up roads with *(a)* 60 mph speed limits and *(b)* 70 mph speed limits.

Mrs. Chalker: Research results show the reduction in injury accidents to be extremely variable. Further studies are in hand to try to improve the information. There are no estimates of likely reductions in the costs of accidents were lighting to be provided on all these roads.

GLC (Lorry Ban)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria he will adopt in deciding whether to retain the Greater London council's current night time lorry ban if, as proposed in his latest transport consultation paper, he takes over responsibility for the Archway road from the Greater London council.

Mrs. Chalker: Our policy is to encourage an support local lorry management measures where they are justified. Policy on this matter was set out in my Department's circular 2/82 "Lorry controls." It is against those criteria that we would judge the case for continuing the present night-time Archway lorry ban if, as proposed, the Secretary of State assumes responsibility for that part of the A1 to which the current ban applies.

London Transport

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements have been initiated to the arrangements for interchange between London Regional Transport and British Rail, other than those already in hand or being planned, since the London Regional Transport Act came into effect.

Mrs. Chalker: While the London Regional Transport Bill was before Parliament, the operators began work on a review of interchanges. That work is now being carried forward under the auspices of the London Passenger Transport Group set up by my right hon. Friend after the London Regional Transport Act 1984 came into force. A number of interchange points are being examined with a view to identifying those where improvements could be of most benefit to travellers.

Railways (Accidents)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been on British Rail during 1984; how many people were killed and injured on each occasion; and what was found to be the cause of each accident.

Mr. Ridley: So far during 1984 there have been 64 significant accidents on British Rail involving passenger trains. Significant accidents, as defined in the Department's published annual report on railway safety, are those which are actually or potentially hazardous to passengers. The accidents during 1984 have resulted in 20 deaths — 17 passengers and three railway staff — 16 serious injuries and 259 minor injuries. The causes of each accident are subject to investigation and will be covered in published reports. The total number of significant accidents in 1984 is likely to be no greater than in recent years, and considerably below the number recorded during the 1970s.

Motorways (Signs)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport at what intervals it is his Department's policy to place speed warning signs on motorways where such signs are used.

Mr. Ridley: Flashing amber lights operated at the roadside by the police are provided at 3-km intervals for the opening of individual sections of new motorway. They are superseded at the same locations by remotely controlled matrix signals in the central reservation. Where there is a need to display different restrictions over individual lanes, such as on the approaches to motorway/motorway interchanges, on an elevated motorway, or on the approaches to motorway tunnels, the matrix signals are mounted at closer intervals on gantries.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of *(a)* a flashing motorway speed warning sign, *(b)* a motorway digital speed warning sign sited in the central reservation and *(c)* an overhead motorway speed warning system.

Mr. Ridley: Typical costs are as follows:

(a) £600 for each sign;

(b) £46,000 for back-to-back post mounted signals at a nominal 3-km spacing;

(c) £231,000 per carriageway for a system of three gantries, which is usually the minimum required for an overhead system.

London Underground

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport in each of the last 10 years, how many fires have occurred on London Transport Underground, which had some effect on passenger service; and what information he has as to the cause of each fire.

Mr. Ridley: The full information to reply to this question is not readily available. I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been on London Transport Underground in each of the last 10 years; and, in each year, how many deaths and how many injuries have been caused.

Mr. Ridley: Details of all serious accidents on London Regional Transport's railways, including the number of deaths and injuries, are given in the Department's published annual reports on railway safety, copies of which are in the Library.

Lorries (Accident Statistics)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have been killed by lorries in Greater London in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ridley: It is not possible to say how many fatalities have arisen from direct collisions with lorries. However, the following data are available:

Fatalities in Greater London in accidents involving lorries

	1982	*1983*
Lorry drivers	1	1
Others (including pedestrians)	67	55

Figures for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define the term "severely injured" in relation to road accident statistics.

Mrs. Chalker: The term "severely injured" is not used by the Department to describe road accident severity. The categories used are fatal, serious and slight, and the definition of each of these terms is given on page 37 of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1983", a copy of which is in the Library.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Stokes asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the evasion of vehicle excise duty.

Mr. Ridley: A report prepared by the Government Statistical Service and published today by my Department gives an estimate of some £70 million to £110 million for the annual revenue loss; 3·5 to 5 per cent. of vehicle excise duty revenue due in Great Britain in 1984-85. The best estimate of the amount of revenue that will be lost due to evasion this financial year is £90 million—just over 4 per cent.

This estimate is based on a roadside survey in June 1984. The survey identified higher than average rates of evasion in London and also indicated a particular problem relating to motor cycles. I have placed copies of the report in the Library.

I am now considering what further action is required in the light of both this report and that of the Public Accounts Committee published on 2 May.

London Regional Transport (Grants)

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his proposals for the levy on London's ratepayers in support of his grants to London Regional Transport for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to the reply*, 17 December 1984, c. 68]: The following is a fuller reply.

Under section 13 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984, I am empowered to make a levy on London ratepayers to cover up to two thirds of the cost of my total grants to London Regional Transport for 1985-86. Accordingly, I have today laid before Parliament a draft levy order, which is subject to affirmative resolution. This provides for a levy of 10·80 pence in the pound, estimated to raise £212 million. This is equivalent to 65·6 per cent. of my estimated expenditure on grants to LRT in 1985-86 of £323 million; the balance of £111 million comes from the Exchequer.

The Government have set LRT the primary task of securing better value for money through improved efficiency. LRT's specific financial objective is to reduce the revenue support requirement to half the 1984-85 level of £190 million by 1987-88. This will enable the Government to continue to reduce the burden upon taxpayers and ratepayers, while providing for continuing substantial levels of capital investment.

Substantial progress is already being made towards these goals. The element of grant for revenue support—about £125 million—is £65 million below the GLC's 1984-85 provision. At the same time, the capital element of the grant—about £200 million—is £50 million more than the GLC's budgeted capital grant for this year. Yet in 1985-86, the ratepayer will have to find only £212 million towards this programme—some £50 million less than in 1984-85 on a comparable basis.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made an adjustment to the grant-related poundage schedule for London authorities in the rate support grant settlement to ensure that London ratepayers, and those elsewhere, are treated fairly following the transfer of LRT financing from local to central Government.

Improving efficiency has enabled LRT to contain its proposed fares increase in January to an average of 9 per cent. which will still leave fares about 10 per cent. lower, in real terms, than they were in May 1981 when the present GLC administration took office. LRT plans to maintain underground services at their present level for 1985-86 and to reduce bus services slightly, in line with falling demand.

The increase in resources for investment will enable LRT further to improve efficiency and to make public transport facilities more attractive to passengers, including, for example, a substantial programme of station modernisation on the underground.

Further details of LRT's proposals for 1985-86 will be given in its annual business plan, which I understand has been published today. Copies will be made available to hon. Members.

British Transport Police

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his policy for the future of the British Transport police;

(2) if he will list the sites at which British Transport police are currently employed and those sites at which they were employed in 1979, giving the numbers employed at each site in both cases;

(3) what procedures there are for vetting private security firms where they are to take over the work of the British Transport police;

(4) what consultations he has had with employers and warehouse owners at the sites on which staff reductions are proposed for the British Transport police;

(5) whether he is satisfied that reductions in the numbers of British Transport police will have no adverse affect on Her Majesty's Government's ability to combat drug smuggling.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to the reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *70*]: The future of the British Transport police force is entirely a matter for the British Railways Board—its employer—in consultation, where necessary, with other users. The responsibility for the detailed deployment of the force rests with the chief constable, and it would be for him to produce information on this subject if he saw fit.

I have no doubt that those responsible for preventing crime, including drugs trafficking, will continue to ensure that these commitments are met. The vetting of private security firms is for those who wish to employ them.

DEFENCE

RAF Basic Trainer

71. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs will be created by the combined Royal Air Force and anticipated overseas sales of each of the contenders for the Royal Air Force basic trainer contract.

Mr. Butler: It is not possible to give precise estimates for the number of jobs which would be likely to be created in connection with each of the four aircraft under consideration, taking into account prospects for overseas sales. However, in view of the fact that the bulk of the airframe and equipment work would fall to United Kingdom firms, regardless of which aircraft was chosen, the number of direct job opportunities would be substantial and run to some hundreds.

Mr. Wilkinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is in a position to announce his decision on the selection of the future Royal Air Force basic trainer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: The four competing tenders have been thoroughly evaluated by the Ministry of Defence. The evaluation has shown that two of the contenders have clear-cut advantages over the others in terms of cost and performance, which are the critical factors involved in the decision. I have therefore decided to invite best and final offers from British Aerospace and Shorts in order to clarify and amplify certain aspects of their present tenders, so that I may reach a final decision between the options, which still include the possibility of refurbishing the Jet Provost.

RAF Stations (Asbestos Cement)

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force stations are currently being refurbished by the Property Services Agency using asbestos cement.

Mr. Lee: This information is not held centrally and its collation may take some time. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Aircraft Contracts

Mr. Maginnis asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of aircraft contracts which have been awarded to *(a)* Short Brothers, *(b)* British Aerospace and *(c)* Westlands by his Department since January 1978.

Mr. Butler: It is not our practice to reveal commercially sensitive information of this kind, but annex F of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984" (Cmnd. 9227-I) gives an indication of the order of payments to these contractors in 1982-83.

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the aircraft business carried out by *(a)* Short Bros., *(b)* British Aerospace and *(c)* Westlands has been provided by his Department's contracts between January 1978 and December 1983.

Mr. Butler: Precise information of this kind could be provided only by the companies themselves.

Royal Ordnance Pension Schemes

Sir Antony Buck asked the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the composition of the boards of trustees of the royal ordnance pension schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: The funds of the two royal ordnance pension schemes will be vested in corporate trustees. The boards of directors of each trustee company will comprise, in addition to a chairman who will at least in the first instance be the chairman of the Royal Ordnance plc, five directors representing the management of the company and five directors representing the work force. This variation from the previously intended composition announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement during the Committee stage of the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Bill—3 April 1984, column 657—has been developed jointly as a result of proposals made by the trades unions.

Lemnos (NATO Troops)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any North Atlantic Treaty Organisation troops stationed on the island of Lemnos.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to my hon. Friend on 14 December 1984 at column *629*.

General Belgrano

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence how long it was before HMS Conqueror's sighting of the General Belgrano was relayed to the task force from Northwood.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *598*]: It appears about half an hour.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence at what time the request from Admiral Woodward that the General Belgrano be sunk was received by Northwood.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *598*]: I cannot add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 22 October at column *471*.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence how long the elapse of time was between the drafting of the sighting report by HMS Conqueror on 1 May 1982 and its receipt by Northwood; and whether there were any communications difficulties between HMS Conqueror and Northwood.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *598*]: The time between drafting and receipt is not known precisely. It is likely to have been less than half an hour.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to ensure that the entry of Spain to the European Economic Community does not lead to the lowering of wage rates and standards of living of citizens of Gibraltar.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 December at column *600*.

Lausanne Treaty

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department has sought from international lawyers outside his Department as to the effect of the Salonika agreement upon the provisions of the treaty of Lausanne in so far as that treaty affects Britain's obligations.

Mr. Renton: In the time available it has not been possible to establish definitely whether such advice has ever been sought. But in view of the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 14 December, at column *628*, such consultation is most unlikely to have been necessary.

Lemnos

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will now make representations to the Government of Greece about the militarisation of the island of Lemnos.

Mr. Renton: No. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 11 December at column *450*.

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation the possibility of making representations to the Greek Government about, or raising in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Council, the issue of the militarisation of the island of Lemnos by Greece.

Mr. Renton: No. The matter is already the subject of consideration by the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is now in a position to give details of the Diplomatic Service posts which are to be closed; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The posts are as follows:

Santo Domingo, Vientiane, Antwerp, Blantyre, Cagliari, Gothenburg, Halifax, Salonika, Vigo and Zagreb.

In addition, I have decided to postpone the planned reopening of an embassy in Conakry and to merge the posts of ambassador to Austria and head of delegation to the MBFR talks in Vienna.

These closures will inevitably mean that Diplomatic Service coverage in the political and consular fields and our support for exporters will not be as comprehensive as in the past, but I am satisfied that overall British interests are better protected by concentrating resources on slightly fewer areas where they are most needed.

We shall be making arrangements for non-resident representation in Santo Domingo and Vientiane.

We are also considering the appointment of honorary consuls where appropriate. An honorary consul gives on-the-spot assistance to British nationals who are in serious difficulties or involved in emergencies; and can also provide useful contacts with local authorities, commerce and industry.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Production (Super Levies)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, why the United Kingdom has to pay super levies to the EEC when the aggregate present level of milk production is below the national quota.

Mr. MacGregor: First-hand purchasers — where formula B is applied—or wholesale producers—where formula A is applied—and producers who sell direct are liable to levy if they exceed their own quotas. Even when national milk production is below the United Kingdom quota, therefore, some individual United Kingdom purchasers or producers may thus be liable for levy if they have not cut back enough.

Badgers

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badgers were slaughtered in response to tuberculosis outbreaks in cattle in Cornwall in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Fenner: No realistic estimates can be made of the number of badgers slaughtered when gassing was the main method of badger control as the setts were sealed after gassing. Since the introduction of live trapping from July 1982 the number of badgers taken in official investigations in Cornwall are as follows:

	Number
1982 (July to December)	73
1983	167
1984 (January to October)	310

Synthetic Alcohol

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the wine settlement agreed at the last meeting of the European Community Heads of Government; and what safeguards have been incorporated to protect the position of British producers of synthetic alcohol.

Mrs. Fenner: Details of the wine settlement were laid in the Library of the House on 10 December. There will be no change in the existing provisions protecting synthetic alcohol producers, but the introduction of an effective guarantee threshold, a restrictive price policy and aids for grubbing up vineyards will have a significant effect on the wine surplus and reduce the output of wine alcohol.

Food Legislation (Review)

Mr. Jackson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the review by officials of food legislation in the United Kingdom has been completed; and what further action the Government propose to take.

Mrs. Fenner: The review by officials of the relevant Departments has been completed and a report submitted to Ministers. My right hon. Friends and I have studied this report and agreed that a consultative document which discusses many aspects of the legislation should be published. Interested organisations representing consumer, manufacturing, retail, health, enforcement and many other groups will be invited to comment on the proposals contained in the document, and on the basis of the representations received we shall consider whether any changes in the law would be desirable.

Agricultural Arbitrators

Mr. Jackson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will announce the date for the transfer of responsibility for the appointment of agricultural arbitrators in England and Wales from Agriculture Ministers to the president of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Mr. Jopling: Section 8 of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1984 provides for the transfer of the Agriculture Ministers' current responsibilities for the appointment of agricultural arbitrators in England and Wales to the

president of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. I indicated during the passage of this legislation that the transfer would not take place for at least a year after Royal Assent. Following consultations with the president, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are proposing to give effect to the transfer as from 1 January 1986. We have decided to announce this now so that the industry will have sufficient notice. I will be making a further statement relating to the detailed arrangements for the transfer towards the end of 1985. These arrangements will be fully discussed with the industry beforehand.

Three statutory instruments will be required to give effect to the transfer and these will be laid before Parliament during the autumn of 1985.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

College-Employer Links Project

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a progress report on the college-employer links project.

Sir Keith Joseph: Good progress is being made in this important venture, which has the support of employer associations, local education authorities and colleges, the further education examining and validating bodies, MSC, HMI and other bodies.

Project directors, supported by local steering committees of employer, college and other interests, are at work in the eight local education authority areas invited to participate in the project — Birmingham, Bradford, Cleveland, Ealing, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Leeds and Wiltshire. Their inquiries of employers and colleges in their area about the effectiveness of links and the appropriateness of college courses to employers' needs are continuing, but a number of key issues have been identified: for example, the problems in serving small businesses; successful integration of in-house company training and college provision, both college-based and "in-plant"; the effectiveness of the advisory machinery in colleges and of employer input and appraisal of courses at both college and LEA level; and staff development needs in colleges and the contribution employers can make to meeting these. In most areas it has been agreed that the studies should concentrate on particular subject areas—examples are engineering, electronics, textiles, information technology, hotel and catering, robotics—and/or particular colleges in the project area. Close contact is being maintained with related initiatives sponsored by the Department and the Manpower Services Commission, particularly in the field of post-experience vocational education and training.

Interim reports are expected by about Easter and final reports by about the end of next year. The department will then consider what action may be required to extend good practice.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria are applied when examining local education authority proposals to cease to maintain a secondary school.

Mr. Dunn: The criteria which my right hon. Friend applies are set out in the Department's circulars 2/80 and 2/81 and in "Administrative Memorandum 4/84", copies of which I am sending to my hon. Friend.

Secondary School Reorganisation (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of Aigburth Vale girls' school and other schools affected by secondary school reorganisation in Liverpool.

Mr. Dunn: On 6 August 1984 my right hon. Friend approved Liverpool city council's proposals, published on 4 November 1983, for the reorganisation of county secondary schools with modifications to retain Holly lodge county secondary school for girls and West Derby county secondary school for boys and to defer implementation until August 1985. The authority is now required to implement these proposals as modified, including the establishment of a new school by amalgamation of Aigburth vale girls' school and Quarry bank high school.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the provision of resources and facilities in the reorganised Roman Catholic secondary schools in Liverpool.

Mr. Dunn: Total grant aid in the order of £2·52 million to £3 million will have been paid by the Department on capital building projects arising solely from Roman Catholic secondary reorganisation over the period since 1982-83; and my right hon. Friend will continue to afford what priority he can within the resources available nationally to support the work required to allow the full implementation of the Liverpool Roman Catholic secondary reorganisation. As the hon. Member is aware, the Department has taken up with Liverpool local education authority the question of the provision of furniture and equipment at the St. Francis Xaviers school in the light of the authority's refusal to purchase those items which are the property of the Society of Jesus, the former proprietor of the school

Single-sex Schools (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what single-sex school provision will be available to parents in south Liverpool from September 1985.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend excluded Holly lodge girls school and West Derby boys school, in order to retain an element of single-sex provision in the county secondary sector, when he approved Liverpool city council's proposals under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 to reorganise county secondary provision. These proposals did not affect the voluntary sector where single-sex provision also continues to be available.

Dyslexic Children

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied that local education authorities possess adequate resources for providing improved learning facilities for dyslexic children.

Mr. Dunn: Yes. Provided that cost increases can be contained, the Government's plans will allow the great

majority of authorities in aggregate to make some improvement in pupil teacher ratios in special education and to maintain their non-teaching costs per pupil at 1982-83 levels. It is, however, for LEAs to determine the allocation of their resources.

Books and Periodicals (Prices)

Mr. Crouch asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the change in price levels of books and periodicals of the type purchased by educational establishments since 1980; if he has any information on the effect of these price changes on the level of purchases; and what account he takes of expenditure incurred by educational establishments on books and periodicals in formulating his general education policies.

Mr. Dunn: Various indices can be used to measure changes in the price of books and periodicals. They include the Publishers Association's index of school book prices, the books, periodicals and binding element of the index of changes in university recurrent costs and the books element of the retail price index. These indices show increases between 1980 and 1984 of some 40 per cent., 70 per cent., and 80 per cent., respectively. The overall retail price index—all items except food—rose by some 50 per cent. over the period. The Department does not collect information on the number of books and periodicals purchased by educational establishments—the measure most clearly affected by price changes. Actual expenditure is subject to a large number of factors. The Government believe that the purchase of books is an area to which priority should be given, within the resources available, in all sectors of education.

16-plus Examination

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how his curricular objectives of breadth and balance may be encouraged through the new single system of 16-plus examinations; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are issuing today a consultation paper setting out our proposals for distinction and merit certificates within the general certificate of secondary education examination. Our objective is to encourage the abler pupils, in particular, to pursue broad and balanced examination courses in the fourth and fifth years of secondary education. Copies of the consultative paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Comments are invited by the end of April 1985.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the level of parental contributions to the fees of pupils in the assisted places scheme in 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: Subject to the usual consultations and to parliamentary approval, the parental contribution scales will be adjusted upwards for the school year 1985-86 in line with earnings, as follows:

Part of relevant income to which specified percentage applies	*One assisted pupil per cent.*	*Each of two assisted pupils per cent.*	*Each of three assisted pupils per cent.*
That part which exceeds £6,210 but does not exceed £6,750	9	6·75	5·25
That part (if any) which exceeds £6,750 but does not exceed £7,300	12	9	7
That part (if any) which exceeds £7,300 but does not exceed £8,400	15	11·25	8·75
That part (if any) which exceeds £8,400 but does not exceed £10,080	21	15·75	12·25
That part (if any) whicl. exceeds £10,080 but does not exceed £12,280	24	18	14
That part (if any) which exceeds £12,280	33	24·75	19·25

Higher Education

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is able to announce his decisions on local authority higher education provisions in 1985-86 and on the distribution of the advanced further education pool for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have today written to the chairman of the committee of the National Advisory Body (NAB) accepting in its entirety its advice on the planned disposition of academic provision and of students in local authority higher education (LAHE) in 1985-86, and on the basis for distributing the advanced further education (AFE) quantum of £620 million for the financial year 1985-86 which I announced in the House on 12 November at column 57.

These plans provide for a further 3 per cent. growth overall in student numbers in LAHE compared with the targets set for 1984-85 and for maintenance of the thrust of the policies embodied in those targets; most notably, the preservation of student access and a continued shift in the balance of provision towards science, engineering and other vocational disciplines, and towards sub-degree and part-time provision.

As I announced on 12 November, the AFE quantum for 1985-86 is over 7·5 per cent. higher than that for 1984-85, when allowance is made for the abolition of the national insurance surcharge. Provided that costs can be contained, the increased quantum should permit broadly the same resources per student in LAHE to be made available in 1985-86 as planned in 1984-85. But, compared with the latest actual levels of expenditure, this still entails continuing reductions in unit costs and in lecturer numbers, and attainment of the 12:1 average student-staff ratio adopted by the NAB as a target for local authority higher education.

The greater part of the £620 million total is being allocated to local education authorities in relation to target student numbers for 1985-86 by institution, mode of attendance and subject. The allocations are being made in such a way as to continue the pressure of high spending institutions to reduce their costs and to afford increased protection to the more economical institutions. The allocations announced today also include, for a few

selected institutions, sums to a total value of £280,000 in support of a biotechnology initiative. A sum of £2·5 million has been set aside for selective support of research in a number of major institutions. I shall announce my decision on the distribution of that sum in the light of further advice from the NAB early in the new year.

Letters are today being sent to local education authorities and institutions notifying them of my decisions. Copies of my letter to the NAB committee chairman, of a note explaining the method by which the AFE quantum for 1985-86 is being distributed, and full details of the allocations—excluding the selective research element—have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the cheapest drug tariff, part V A and V D, price for each of the following drugs and for the most expensive branded form of the drug currently available to National Health Service practitioners: Amitriptyline, Ampicillin, Diazepam, Frusemide, Imipramine, Indomethacin, Methyldopa, Nitrazepam, Propanolol and Temazepam; and if he will estimate the total annual difference in cost to the National Health Service if all prescriptions for the above drugs were dispensed in generic forms rather than branded forms.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The following comparisons are given of the most commonly prescribed strength and pack sizes at current prices.

Strength mg	*Pack Size*	*Drug*	*Drug Tariff Price (£)*	*Branded Price (£)*
25	500	Amitriptylin	3·84	10·28
250	100	Ampicillin	2·56	7·34
5	1,000	Diazepam	2·32	13·62
40	500	Frusemide	2·80	27·14
25	500	Imipramine	2·71	15·75
25	500	Indomethacin	5·66	24·85
250	1,000	Methyldopa	19·71	59·40
5	500	Nitrazepam	2·20	12·02
40	1,000	Propanolol	5·57	39·70
10	100	Temazepam	not listed	4·88

Drug tariff prices are those included in part VIII (formerly part V) categories A and S of the tariff.

If all prescriptions for these drugs had been dispensed in their generic form rather than branded form it is estimated that the difference in cost would have been £24·8 million (gross). This estimate relates to family practitioner services in England only in 1983, the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the aggregate annual savings which would be made if Mogadon, Valium, Lasix, Panadol and Aldomet were to be prescribed in their therapeutical equivalents by generic names.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: If all prescriptions for the drugs named had been dispensed in their generic rather than proprietary form it is estimated that the difference in cost would have been £16·7 million (gross). This estimate relates to family practitioner services in England only in 1983, the latest year for which figures are available.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many clinical psychologists are employed within each regional health authority; and how those figures compare with the norms recommended by the Trethowan report in 1977.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Provisional numbers of clinical psychologists employed within each regional health authority as at 30 September 1983 are given in the table. In addition, a further 16·3 whole-time equivalents were on the staff at London postgraduate teaching hospitals, giving a total for England of 1306·6 whole-time equivalents.

The Trethowan report (1977) on the role of psychologists in the health services recommended that the number of clinical psychologists employed be increased to about 1,100 for England and Wales over a period of six to seven years, as a minimum target for the shorter term. This minimum target has been exceeded.

NHS Clinical Psychologists as at 30 September 1983 (Provisional Figures)

Regional Health Authority	*Whole-time equivalents*	*(per 100,000 population)*
Northern	74·2	(2·4)
Yorkshire	77·2	(2·1)
Trent	91·0	(2·0)
East Anglia	46·4	(2·4)
North West Thames	115·9	(3·4)
North East Thames	125·7	(3·4)
South East Thames	112·6	(3·1)
South West Thames	99·9	(3·4)
Wessex	60·2	(2·1)
Oxford	47·9	(2·0)
South Western	101·1	(3·3)
West Midlands	110·7	(2·1)
Mersey	62·8	(2·6)
North Western	164·9	(4·1)
TOTAL (ENGLAND)	1290·3	(2·8)

Doctors (Training)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors are currently training in the National Health Service and what were the figures for 1960, 1970, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All doctors below consultant grade in the main hospital grades are undergoing further and often highly specialised training prior to obtaining full clinical autonomy although, they are all qualified doctors and some are senior and experienced. On that basis there were 24,255 qualified doctors in NHS training grades in England, including locums and university staff in honorary NHS contracts at 30 September 1983. More recent information is not yet available. Exactly comparable figures for earlier years are not available, but the table gives the numbers in the training grades of the hospital service, in community medicine and in the general medical services (excluding locums in each case) for the years 1963, 1970, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Doctors in NHS training grades in England 1963-1983

Year	Total	Hospital Services*	Community-Medicine†	General Medical Services‡
1963	n.a.	10,045	n.a.	195
1970	n.a.	12,958	n.a.	194
1979	20,934	19,671	120	1,143
1980	21,745	20,258	134	1,353
1981	22,470	20,761	148	1,561
1982	22,707	20,946	184	1,577
1983	23,196	21,358	214	1,624

* Permanent paid and honorary doctors in post at 30 September in the following grades: senior registrar, registrar, senior house officer, house officer.

† Permanent paid staff in post at 30 September each year in the following grades: senior registrar, registrar and senior house officer.

‡ Trainees in post at 1 October each year.

Debendox

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what investigations the Committee on Safety of Medicines has made into the possible teratogenic effects of the drug Debendox; and what its findings were.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The committee considered the safety of Debendox on eight occassions, the last being in March 1983. On each occasion the committee's advice was that there was no acceptable scientific evidence that Debendox caused harm to the foetus.

Doctors (Retirement)

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the retirement age for general practitioners.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) on 17 May, at column *258*.

Wellfield Site, Hatfield

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department will be making regarding the planned development of the Wellfield site in Hatfield for the expansion of geriatric and other patient care by the health authority to the forthcoming inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I understand the chairman of the East Hertfordshire health authority will be presenting the health authority's case for the proposals at the forthcoming inquiry on behalf of my right hon. Friend. I am not aware that the chairman has requested any representative of the Department to attend or submit formal evidence.

Death Grant

Mr Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many men born before 5 July 1883, and how many women born before 5th July 1888, are ineligible for the full death grant;

(2) what was the total number of deaths in Great Britain in each of the last 10 years; and whether he will estimate for each of those years the number of cases where no payment or payment at a reduced rate of the death grant was made;

(3) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the present rates of the death grant for an adult, on full benefit, for a child aged under three years, for a child between three to five years and for a child aged between six and 17 years;

(4) what rate of grant is payable for the death of people who were within 10 years of pension age in July 1948 and born between 5 July 1883 and 4 July 1893 in the case of a man and between 5 July 1888 and 4 July 1898 in the case of a woman.

Mr. Whitney: The present rates of the national insurance death grant are as follows:

	£
Child under 3	9·00
Child 3-5	15·00
Child 6-17	22·50
Adult 17 and over	30·00
Man born 5 July 1883-4 July 1893 or woman born 5 July 1888-4 July 1898	15·00
Stillborn child or man born before 5 July 1893 or woman born before 5 July 1888	No grant

Information on deaths in the past 10 years is as follows:

Year	1 Total no. of deaths	2 Grants paid at full rate	3 Grants paid at reduced rate	4 Deaths, where no grant was paid
1974	650	381	163	106
1975	646	408	153	85
1976	664	419	146	99
1977	638	435	132	71
1978	651	458	125	68
1979	659	474	119	66
1980	645	482	111	52
1981	642	*487	*104	51
1982	647	505	92	50
1983	643	514	86	43

Notes:

1. All figures are in 1000s.
2. Figures annotated * are estimates only owing to industrial action.
3. Column 4 includes cases where no claim was made.

In June 1983 in England and Wales there were an estimated 1,500 men born before 5 July 1883 and 28,500 women born before 5 July 1888. (Figures for Scotland are not available in this form).

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) on how many occasions, in what years and by what amount the death grant has been increased since it was first introduced;

(2) by what amount the purchasing power of the death grant has decreased since 1967;

(3) by what amount the existing death grant would need to be increased to restore it to the 1967 value of the grant;

(4) by what amount the existing death grant would need to be increased to restore it to its 1949 value.

Mr. Whitney: The standard rate of the death grant was introduced at £20 in 1949. It was increased to £25 in 1958 and to the present rate of £30 in 1967.

The grant would need to be raised to £175 to restore its 1967 value or £225 to restore the 1949 value. The purchasing power of the grant has declined by 82·7 per cent. since 1967.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Service (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the organisations which made representations to his Department in response to the consultative document "The Death Grant", of March 1982;

(2) whether he will publish in full in the *Official Report* the foreword by the Minister for Social Security to the consultative document "The Death Grant".

Mr. Whitney: A copy of "The Death Grant, A Consultative Document" containing the foreword published in March 1982 is available in the Library. The names of the organisations who made representations to the Department in response to the consultative document on the death grant are as follows. Where a national organisation or trades union is listed, local or regional branches may also have made submissions. Representations were also received from a number of health authorities, local authorities, councils of social service, councils of voluntary service, welfare committees, war pensions committees, funeral directors, community health councils, constituency parties, academics and private individuals:

National Association of Health Authorities in England and Wales.
Age Concern.
Dounreay Retirement Fellowship.
Tyne, Wear, Durham and District Pensioners' Association.
The Officers' Association.
National Association of Fire Brigade Pensioners.
Bristol Good Companion Service.
Transport and General Workers Union.
British Pensioners' and Trade Union Action Association.
The Leukaemia Society.
Pensioners' Voice.
Association of Metropolitan Authorities.
Rosewell Old Age Pensioners' Association.
Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association.
Royal Naval Association.
Trades Union Congress.
Association of District Committees for the Health and Personal Social Services, Northern Ireland.
Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers.
National Deaf Children's Society.
Association of District Councils.
Dundee Association for Social Service.
Multiple Sclerosis Society, Association of Scottish Branches.
Catholic Women's League.
Scottish Old Age Pensioners' Association.
Northern Ireland Consumer Council.
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.
Royal British Legion.
Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped.
Cruse.
Health Visitors' Association.
War Veterans Association.
National Union of Teachers.
The Mothers' Union.
Women's Institute.
Association of Scottish Local Health Councils.
Citizen's Advice Bureau.
War Widows Association of Great Britain.
Confederation of Health Service Employees.
National Association of Funeral Directors.
Society of Graphical and Allied Trades.
Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland.
The Labour Party, National Labour Women's Committee.
Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance.
Help the Aged.
Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland.
Public Service Pensioners' Council.
Dundee Trades Council.
Leicester and District Traders Council.
Westminster Active Pensioners.
Flint and District Unions Trades Council (Clwyd).
Oxford Consumers Group.
National Federation of Post Office and British Telecom Pensioners.
West Midlands Pensioners' Convention.
Methodist Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association.
Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.
Exeter Municipal Charities.
Plaid Cymru.
Institute of Home Help Organisers.
Paisley and District Trades Council Senior Citizens.
Family Service Unit.
War Widows Association of Great Britain.
Board for Social Responsibility.
South Tyneside Disablement Advisory Centre.
Inner London Education Authority Central Committee of Divisional Associations of School Care Workers.
Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration.
Deanery of Telford Severn Gorge.
Sheffield Pensioners' Action Group.
Women's National Commission.
British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association.
Amalgamated Union of Engineering and Foundry Workers.
Association of County Councils.
The Retirement Association of Northern Ireland.
Churches Central Committee for Community Work.
Shafton Tenants and Residents Association.
St. Katherines Centre, Welfare Rights Office, Aberdeen.
The National Housewives Association Ltd.
Moray District Federation of Community Halls and Associations.
Brittle Bone Society.
National Association of Widows.
Standing Conference of Women's Organisations.
Over 60 Club, Bradninch, Exeter.
Society of Civil and Public Servants.
The Crypt Youth Centre, Wolverhampton.
Christie Hospital and Holt Radium Institute.
Durham County Federation of Community Organisations.
London Boroughs Association.
Tooting Action Pensioners.
National Council of Women of Great Britain.
National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers.
Royal Air Force Association.
Liberal Party, Taxation and Social Security Panel.
Church of Ireland, Armagh Diocesan Board of Social Responsibility.
Scottish Legal Action Group.
University Grants Committee.
Co-operative Union Ltd., Parliamentary Committee.
Dignity in Death Alliance.
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.
Western General Hospital.
Portchester Crematorium Joint Committee.

Peterborough Trades Union Council.
National Consumer Council.
Task Force Working with Pensioners.
Spastics Society.
The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths.
Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
United Kingdom Federation of Business and Professional Women.
Sale Moor Afternoon Townswomen's Guild.
Scottish Paraplegic Association.
Greater London Pensioners' Trade Union Action Association.
General Federation of Trade Unions.
National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants.
Royal Institution for the Blind.
Hetton Area Rights Centre.
Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland.
Co-operative Funeral Service Managers' Association.
Co-operative Women's Guild.
Association of Charity Officers.
Welsh Consumer Council.
National Association of Local Government Officers.
Conference of Metropolitan Deans.
Alder Hey Children's Hospital.
Association of Community Health Councils.
Law Society of Scotland.
Biddulph Moor Evergreen Club.
Scottish TUC.
Association of Shetland Community Councils.
National Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations.
Scottish Association for Mental Health.
Manchester Trade Union Council, Pensioners and Trade Unionists Association.
The Joint Group on Funeral Services.
Northamptonshire Association of Trades Councils.
Association of Retired Council Officers.
NHS Retirement Fellowship.
Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils.
Association of Grampian District Councils.
Catholic Social Services, Liverpool.
Order of St. John of Jerusalem and the British Red Cross Society.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will estimate, for the latest year for which figures are available, the total expenditure on the death grant; whether he will estimate the cost represented by administration; and whether he will estimate comparable figures for the costs of supplementary benefits.

Mr. Whitney: In 1983-84, the latest date for which figures are available, the estimated cost of the death grant was £29·2 million, including administrative costs of approximately £12·5 million. For the amount of supplementary benefit paid in respect of funeral expenses I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 17 December, at column *47*. The administrative cost of making such payments in 1982 was somewhat over £100,000.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the foreword by the Minister for Social Security to the consultative document, "The Death Grant", still represents Government policy; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he is satisfied with the workings of the Social Security Act 1975, section 32, schedule 3, paragraph 7 and Schedule 4, part II; and whether he will make a statement;

(3) whether he will bring forward proposals for the payment of a death grant to those parents on supplementary benefit who have suffered the loss of a stillborn baby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The existing provisions operate satisfactorily in that there is a take up of death grant of more than 90 per cent., although it is recognised that this no longer represents a significant contribution towards funeral costs. The purpose of the consultative document issued in 1982 was to determine whether there was a consensus in favour of a scheme which directed the available resources towards those most in need of assistance. None of the proposals in the document received popular approval and the future of the death grant, including the categories to be covered, is now being considered in the context of the formulation of wider Government proposals for the future of social security.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how his Department monitors claims for attendance allowance when the recipient moves from private accommodation to a local authority supported private home.

Mr. Newton: Notes in payment order books require a claimant to notify the Department of any change in circumstances which may affect his entitlement to attendance allowance. Entry into residential accommodation which is provided by or with the help of a public or local authority is one such change which is specified to be reported.

National Insurance Contributions

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what total contributions were made to the national insurance system in money terms by a male and a female employee retiring at the most convenient recent date, after a career in full employment at the national average wage; and what the total figures would have been if each year's contributions had been upvalued at compound interest of 2½ per cent. per annum and at the rate of increase of the retail price index.

Mr. Whitney: From 1948, when the national insurance system started, to April 1984, the total figures are as follows:

	Males £	*Females* £
Total actual NI contributions	4,728·36	3,178·76
Total actual NI contributions compounded each year by 2·5 per cent.	5,490·59	3,748·43
Total actual NI contributions uprated by the RPI	9,803·21	7,087·10

NOTES:

1. National insurance contributions are at the non-contracted out rate.
2. Graduated retirement benefit contributions are not included because the average earnings, whole economy, are not available for the period graduated contributions were payable.
3. Earnings related national insurance contributions were introduced in April 1975. From that date to April 1983 average earnings estimates are in respect of full-time adult workers—males aged 21 and over; females aged 18 and over—and have been derived by using the index of average earnings (whole economy-seasonally adjusted). From April 1983 the average earnings estimates are in respect of all adult workers.
4. Yearly contributions have been assessed by using the derived earnings obtained for the October of each year on the assumption that average weekly earnings for that month represent the average for the whole of the tax-year.
5. The retail price index revaluation is based on the movements in the retail price index every year from October 1948 until October 1983.

Population Statistics

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the official figure of females over 60 years of age and males over 65 years of age in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The estimates for 30 June 1983 are:

	Number
Females aged 60 and over	6,793,600
Males aged 65 and over	3,300,000

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure that local authorities which are eligible to operate a high rent scheme under the system of housing benefit but have not yet applied for authorisation are encouraged to apply.

Mr. Newton: The conditions for authorisation of high rent schemes have been brought to the attention of all local authorities. Whether to apply is entirely a matter for local decision.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to introduce the amendments to the housing benefit regulations referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) on 16 November, *Official Report*, column *381*.

Mr. Newton: The Housing Benefit Amendment (No. 4) Regulations were laid before the House today. The regulations close the unintended loophole in the housing benefit regulations which allowed a grown-up son or daughter living at home to receive a rent allowance for the rent element of any board and lodging payment made to his or her parents. They also introduce measures to prevent abuse of the scheme by the creation of joint tenancies and correct a defect in the regulations which prevented former licencees from receiving help with payments they have to make if they continue to occupy their accommodation after the licence to occupy has been terminated.

Limited List Prescribing

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to announce a final decision about the number and scope of the limited list of pharmaceutics announced in the debate on the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure that National Health Service patients affected by his proposals to limit the drugs prescribable for them are adequately informed of the changes before 1 April 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will draw up and announce the lists of the drugs which will, and will not, be prescribable under the National Health Service as soon as possible after the consultation period ends on 31 January 1985.

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, when he considers his proposal to limit the range of drugs which may be prescribed under the National Health Service, he will take account of allergies exhibited by some patients to certain generic prescriptions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The consultations which we are undertaking with the medical profession and other interested parties are designed to ensure that, within the categories of drugs to be included in the limited list, prescribers will be able to choose from an adequate range of alternative generic drugs to meet their patients' needs.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what further representations he has received from pharmaceutical companies resultant upon his statement of 8 November; and what has been the tenor of his replies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have so far arranged two meetings with representatives of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. In addition, our officials have had discussions with several companies affected by the proposals.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, on the basis of his current draft of the drugs to be included on the limited list, he will estimate company by company and in total the effect on each of the pharmaceutical companies whose relevant products are currently planned to be excluded; if he will publish the estimates in the *Official Report*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. We do not have sufficient data to make accurate estimates of this kind.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a comparison of the prices of those products which he is currently considering placing on the limited list of medications which may be prescribed by doctors for patients under the National Health Service with the cost of their most widely-prescribed brand-name equivalents.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 10 December 1984, c. *383*]: In 1983 the average net ingredient cost per prescription for branded products in the therapeutic categories covered by our proposals was three-and-a-half times that of prescriptions for the generic alternatives set out in the provisional list we published on 8 November. We cannot list those drugs which will remain available on NHS prescription after 1 April 1985, nor those which will not, until after the completion of our consultation with the professions and the industry.

Geriatric Beds

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service beds for geriatrics are occupied; and what percentage this represents of the average daily occupied beds.

Mr. John Patten: The average daily number of occupied beds in the specialty of geriatric medicine in 1983 was 50,797. This represents 18 per cent. of all occupied beds in NHS hospitals in England. As I explained to my hon. Friend in my reply on 4 December at column *174*, aggregated bed occupancy is not a good indicator of efficient bed use.

Psychiatric Hospitals (Beds)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patient beds are unoccupied in psychiatric hospitals and units due to shortage of nursing staff; how many wards have had to be closed for this

reason in each of the last two years; how many nurses would have to be recruited and trained to correct current understaffing; if, in addition to total figures, he will give the figures for each region separately; and what action he is taking.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not held centrally.

The right hon. Member's suggestion concerning current understaffing should, however, be seen against the information in paragraph 4.52 of "The Health Service in England", which was published this year, which, among other things, showed that over five years the number of nursing staff in mental illness per 100,000 population has improved by about 22 per cent.

Blindness Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what further representations his Department has received in the last year in support of a blindness allowance; and if there is any action he will be taking now or in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Newton: We have received over 200 representations in the last year, mainly from right hon. and hon. Members, referring to the recent campaign for a blindness allowance organised by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind and the National League of the Blind and Disabled. As regards meetings with deputations, I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 29 November at column *575*.

On the question of the introduction of a blindness allowance, I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on 22 October at column *514*.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department has received to extend eligibility for mobility allowance to blind people in the past year.

Mr. Newton: In the past year we have received nine representations, mainly from right hon. and hon. Members, on behalf of blind people and a further twenty-nine representations on behalf of people who are deaf and blind.

I also met during the year with representatives of the Deaf-Blind Helpers' League and the North Regional Association for the Blind.

Prescriptions

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what has been the total number of prescriptions issued under the National Health Service in each of the last 10 years;

(2) what has been the total cost to the National Health Service of prescriptions in each of the last 10 years; and what his figure is as a percentage of the total National Health Service expenditure in each of those years;

(3) what has been the total revenue from prescription charges in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what this figure is as a percentage of total National Health Service expenditure in each of those years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table:

Financial year	*Number of NHS prescriptions dispensed* (millions)*	*Gross cost of prescriptions† (£ million)*	*Cost as proportion of total NHS expenditure Percentage*	*Income from FPS prescription charges (£ million)*	*Income as proportion of total NHS expenditure Percentage*
1974-75	288·8	296·7	8·6	23·1	0·7
1975-76	304·3	380·7	8·4	22·7	0·5
1976-77	305·2	477·5	9·3	23·1	0·4
1977-78	316·6	590·3	10·4	23·3	0·4
1978-79	326·2	699·5	10·8	24·2	0·4
1979-80	322·1	790·1	10·2	38·6	0·5
1980-81	318·9	973·7	9·8	70·8	0·7
1981-82	323·6	1,124·7	10·1	86·6	0·8
1982-83	332·5	1,290·0	10·6	102·8	0·8
1983-84	339·1	‡1,430·6	11·1	‡110·0	0·9

* All figures relate to prescriptions, including hospital prescriptions, dispensed in England by community pharmacists, drug stores and appliance contractors, prescriptions dispensed by dispensing doctors (excluding those dispensed under capitation fee arrangements) and items personally administered by prescribing doctors.

† Includes the cost of fees and allowances paid for dispensing.

‡ Provisional.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* all those dates on which the National Health Service prescription charge has been raised; and what was the new value of the charge on each of those dates.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since its introduction in 1952, the charge paid on drugs dispensed by community pharmacists against NHS prescription has changed as follows:

Date	—	
1 June 1952	—	1/- (5p) per form
1 December 1956	—	1/-(5p) per item
1 March 1961	—	2/- (10p) per item
1 February 1965	—	prescription charges abolished
10 June 1968	—	prescription charge reintroduced at 2/6d (12½p) per item

Date	—	
1 April 1971	—	20p per item
16 July 1979	—	45p per item
1 April 1980	—	70p per item
1 December 1980	—	£1·00 per item
1 April 1982	—	£1·30 per item
1 April 1983	—	£1·40 per item
1 April 1984	—	£1·60 per item

Ionising Radiation

Mr. Rowe asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's interim report on diseases induced by ionising radiation is to be published; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The council's interim report is being published today. It describes its investigation to date and explains that there is insufficient evidence at present to enable it to make any recommendations. The council proposes to look at this matter again when results from studies currently in progress are available.

NHS (Charges)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the gross income to the National health Service from charges made for pathology and radiology work, respectively, carried out for private patients of consultants; what is the net income from each; and what is the current scale of charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *475*.]: We do not collect this detailed information centrally.

The current scale of charges for private non-resident patients is set out in appendix C of HC (84) 6 and supplementary guidance on radiological unit values for various procedures is contained in appendix C of HN (79) 28. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 December 1984

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Security Forces, Northern Ireland

Miss Maynard asked the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to require, in cases of major public concern involving the security forces in Northern Ireland, that when a case is considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions and a decision is made not to bring a prosecution, the Director of Public Prosecutions should state the reasons for his decision.

The Attorney-General: No. When a decision is reached not to bring a prosecution against an individual it is a long-established and well-founded practice in Northern Ireland, as in England and Wales, not to give detailed reasons. Cases involving members of the security forces cannot be treated differently from other cases.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Surveillance Equipment

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has yet completed the review of the use of equipment in police surveillance operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: The review has recently been completed, and I have today placed a copy of the revised guidelines in the Library of the House. The new guidelines contain more detailed and rigorous procedures than those in the previous guidance which was issued in 1977 and placed in the Library of the House in February 1982. The main changes are as follows:

(1) The criteria for the authorisation of the use of listening devices, and of certain types of visual surveillance, are considerably tightened. In general such devices are henceforth to be used only when an investigation concerns serious crime; normal methods of investigation have been tried and failed or must, from the nature of things, be unlikely to succeed if tried; and there is good reason to think that the use of the equipment would be likely to lead to an arrest and a conviction, or to the prevention of acts of terrorism;

(2) Authorisation levels and procedures are laid down for both aural and visual surveillance. The range of circumstances is extended in which the Chief Constable's personal authority is required for the use of surveillance devices;

(3) More detailed records are to be kept of the occasions on which both aural and visual surveillance equipment is authorised, issued and used. These records are to be made available for inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary;

(4) Guidance is given on the retention of the product of surveillance; its use in court proceedings and outside the police service; and its destruction when no longer needed;

(5) The new guidelines explicitly rule out the use of surveillance devices in circumstances (such as in a public telephone box) where the sole purpose or only foreseeable result of their use is to overhear speech transmitted by telephone.

The guidance issued in 1977 recommended that records should be kept of the use of aural surveillance devices, and the new guidelines will require records to be kept for both aural and visual devices. Whilst these records will be made available for inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary it is not intended to record this information centrally on a continuing basis, since the use of surveillance devices is, subject to the advice given in the guidelines, an operational matter for individual chief officers.

I am satisfied from the inquiries I have made in the course of this review that the scale of use of surveillance devices, particularly in circumstances where most sensitive questions of privacy arise, is not excessive. The guidelines make clear that a range of surveillance devices is used for a wide variety of purposes, and all forces make use of surveillance devices to a greater or lesser extent. In view of this wide range of devices and circumstances, statistical information would be meaningful only if it were broken down to indicate different types of device and operation, but it would not be in the interests of the prevention and detection of crime for information to be made public in this degree of detail.

I am confident that the revised and tightened guidelines, coupled with the attention that will continue to be given to these matters by Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary, will ensure that surveillance devices of all kinds are used only where strictly necessary for the proper and efficient conduct of police operations, and with due regard for the intrusion of privacy that may result in particular circumstances.

Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any inquiries since 29 November, whether oral or written, that Yasser Arafat should be granted a visa to enter the United Kingdom in the near future, notwithstanding the abandonment of his recent proposed visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: We have received no such inquiries.

Detained Persons

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were held in custody in metropolitan police stations for the latest available date; and, of those, how many were subsequently (i) charged and (ii) released without charge.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply in relation to section 62 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 for the Metropolitan police district (i) the total number of notices to prisoners handed to people in custody in metropolitan police stations for the latest available period and (ii) a breakdown of the total by *(a)* notification of arrest given to person named, *(b)* notification of arrest not requested and *(c)* notification of arrest delayed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information available centrally relates to the total number of people arrested and the number of cases in which there was a delay in excess of four hours, or of 24 hours, before action was taken to notify a person nominated under section 62 of the Criminal

Law Act 1977. Statistics for 1983 by police force area were published in Home Office "Statistical Bulletin", issue 9/84 on 19 April 1984, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide for the latest available date (i) a breakdown of the number of police officers in the Metropolitan police by division and rank, (ii) a breakdown of the number of civilian personnel in the Metropolitan police by division and type of work, (iii) a breakdown of the number of police officers currently working at district level by district and rank, (iv) a breakdown of the number of police officers currently working at area level by area and rank and (v) a breakdown of the number of police officers currently working at headquarters level by branch and rank.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide in relation to the proposed reorganisation of the Metropolitan police (i) a breakdown of the number of police officers working at headquarters level by department and rank after initial reorganisation in January 1985 and (ii) an indication of the proportion of Metropolitan police officers to be employed at headquarters level, area level and divisional level after the reorganisation is complete.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Initial reorganisation will involve changes in lines of command but no redeployment of officers within headquarters or from headquarters to areas or divisions. There will thereafter be a progressive redeployment from headquarters to areas and divisions over a period of at least two years. The details of this reorganisation will be subject to consultation and it is not possible to give figures at this stage.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue a statement in the light of the proposed reorganisation of the Metropolitan police and of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act consultation procedures, advising London local authorities as to whom in the Metropolitan police they should consult within each borough during and after reorganisation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Under section 106 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act it will be the Commissioner's duty to make consultative arrangements in the metropolis. In doing so he will be required to consult London borough and district councils as to the particular arrangements that would be appropriate for each borough or district, or part of a district which falls within the Metropolitan police district. The Commissioner will consult the councils in the light of the progress that has been made with the force reorganisation at the time, and of the need to avoid unnecessary disruption to existing consultative groups which conform to the guidance which my right hon. and learned Friend will be issuing to him under the Act. In the meantime, councils should continue to liaise with district commanders.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average overtime payment made to individual officers of the Metropolitan police by rank for each tour of duty worked on mutual aid during the miners' dispute;

(2) what was the total amount of overtime payments paid to officers of the Metropolitan police on mutual aid duties during the miners' dispute, by month.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Attacks on Women (Statistics)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of attacks on women in the Metropolitan police area for each year since 1979 and for each month to date in 1984 by category of *(a)* rape, *(b)* indecent assault by age group and *(c)* incest; and what is the number of successful prosecutions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the latest available annual information is published in appendix 4ii of his annual report for 1983 (Cmnd. 9268). The number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in the first nine months of 1984 is given in the following table. I shall write as soon as possible about the number of prosecutions.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police
Metropolitan police district

1984	*Rape*	*Indecent assault on a female*	*Incest**
January	22	109	5
February	29	148	3
March	17	118	4
April	27	126	—
May	25	160	1
June	32	143	4
July	42	165	2
August	37	173	2
September	37	149	5

* These figures may include some offences where the victim was male.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the sources of supply of non-purpose bred cats and dogs to laboratories registered under the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I do not have the information requested. There are currently no statutory controls over the sources of supply of cats and dogs to laboratories except for the prohibition in the Dogs Act 1906 on the disposal of stray dogs in this way by the police.

Guernsey

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the extension to Guernsey of the Exchange Control Act 1947; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: As yet my right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Open University

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action is in hand to review the financial position of the Open University; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's grant to the Open University is reviewed annually. My right hon. Friend will consider the position in the light of the recent public expenditure survey and the report of the visiting committee, which he expects to receive shortly.

Vandalism

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many cases of vandalism and theft have occurred in west midlands schools during the last five years; what has been the total cost to the ratepayers resulting therefrom in each single year during the same period; and what additional resources he is prepared to allocate to local education authorities for the purpose of installing adequate alarm systems in secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: Information about the incidence and cost of vandalism and theft in schools is not collected centrally. The Department last year issued a broadsheet entitled "Vandalism in schools and colleges: some possible ways of reducing damage" which recognised that the problems of vandalism are best tackled locally in the light of needs and circumstances. It is for individual local education authorities to meet the cost of any preventive measures they take within the resources available to them.

Private Contractors

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many private cleaning firms have had their contracts with local education authorities cancelled resulting from lack of provision of satisfactory cleaning standards in primary and secondary schools; and what steps he intends to take to monitor standards of such work performed by private contractors.

Mr. Dunn: Detailed information is not collected centrally. It is the responsibility of a local education authority to monitor any work undertaken for it by private contractors.

Youth Provision (Finance)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what level of finance he has assessed that local education authorities should spend on youth provision in 1985 as part of their grant-related expenditure assessment figure; and if he is satisfied that local education authorities will possess adequate resources to devote funding sufficient for youth provision.

Mr. Brooke: The figure for aggregate local authority expenditure on the youth service underlying the 1985-86 RSG settlement is £104 million. This compares with a figure of £92 million underlying the 1984-85 settlement. This level of provision should allow authorities to continue to support the particular role of the youth service in overall provision for young people. It is, however, for individual authorities to decide on their expenditure priorities within the overall level of resources available.

Students (Financial Support)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the forthcoming review of financial support for students will cover postgraduate and mature students; and if it will invite evidence from individuals with views on the matter.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 10 December, at column 333.

Non-human Primates

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many non-human primates were used for whatever reason during the last period of 12 months for which figures are available in places of further or higher education; and what was the comparable figure for each of the last five years.

Mr. Brooke: This information is not collected by the Department. Limited information is, however, available from statistics maintained by the Home Office in the exercise of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department's responsibilities under the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876. I suggest my hon. Friend gets in touch with the Home Office direct about that information.

ENERGY

Coal Industry

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the net saving to the taxpayer of phasing out uneconomic coal pits.

Mr. David Hunt: It is a matter for the National Coal Board to decide which pits are uneconomic, but in the financial year 1983-84 the 10 per cent. of capacity which was most uneconomic lost over £350 million.

Mr. Concannon asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library a copy of the report by the auditors of the National Coal Board, submitted to him by the board, into increases in provision for surface damage arising from subsidence in the north Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that the National Coal Board, in making copies of this report available to the Select Committee on Energy, has requested that it be treated in confidence.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Energy what sums of public money have been invested in the coalmining industry in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. David Hunt: Investment expenditure by the National Coal Board in each of the last 10 years has been as follows:

	£ million
1974-75	145
1975-76	217
1976-77	279

	£ million
1977-78	350
1978-79	481
1979-80	661
1980-81	807
1981-82	812
1982-83	842
1983-84	702

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total of all grants paid to the coal industry, expressed as a figure per employee in the industry, in *(a)* 1980-81, *(b)* 1981-82, *(c)* 1982-83 and *(d)* 1983-84; and what is the estimated equivalent for *(e)* 1984-85 and *(f)* 1985-86.

Mr. David Hunt: Subsidy—defined as grants plus expenditure on the redundant mineworkers payments scheme—per employee in the coal industry was £922 in 1980-81, £2,242 in 1981-82, £2,257 in 1982-83 and £5,412 in 1983-84. Figures for 1984-85 and 1985-86 are not available.

Coalfields (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many times since March 1984 he and other Energy Ministers have visited coalfields in the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Hunt: In October I visited two National Coal Board area headquarters and the National Coal Board's mining and research establishment at Bretby. There have been no other visits to coalfields by Energy Ministers since March.

Combined Heat and Power Scheme (Belfast)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Energy when a decision will be made on the application by Belfast to be accepted as one of the three United Kingdom cities to qualify for grant aid towards the provision of a combined heat and power scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: The 10 proposals received, including two for London, covering all the nine towns recommended for further study by the Atkins report, are being evaluated by my Department. A statement will be made in due course.

Gas Industry

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Energy what sums of public money have been invested in the gas industry in Great Britain in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: BGC's annual accounts show that, over the last decade, new capital investment has been as follows:

	New Capital Investment £ million
1974-75	239
1975-76	347
1976-77	244
1977-78	201
1978-79	235
1979-80	343
1980-81	514
1981-82	515
1982-83	801
1983-84	1,096

Oil Exploration and Development

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will now institute a review of the methods under which oil exploration and development licences are granted, with a view to considering methods by which the owners of property under which oil and gas is found can share in the returns.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I do not propose to review onshore licensing. Property in petroleum is vested in the Crown by virtue of section 1 of the Petroleum (Production) Act 1934. Licences granted under the powers conferred by the Act do not carry any rights to access to property, and individual owners are free to negotiate appropriate terms for access and use of land.

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what studies he has made of onshore oil and gas drillings and development procedures in the United States of America, and of the incentives and returns available to the owners of the land under which oil or gas is found; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Title to property in petroleum in the United States of America is different from the United Kingdom where that title rests in the Crown. Owners of land are free to negotiate appropriate terms for access or other use of land.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Brandon-Bravo asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the financial objectives of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Peter Walker: In agreement with the Electricity Council, I have set a new financial target for the electricity supply industry in England and Wales which will involve an average return on net assets over the three years 1985-86 to 1987-88 of 2·75 per cent. I have also set the electricity supply industry a performance aim of reducing controllable unit costs by the end of 1987-88 by 6·1 per cent. as compared with 1983-84.

Nuclear Repositories

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he proposed to announce the criteria for the establishment of nuclear repositories in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I assume my hon. Friend has in mind the final version of the assessment principles which will be used by the authorising Departments for evaluating proposals for nuclear waste disposal facilities on land. These will be published shortly after Parliament returns.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Divisions

Mr. Best asked the Lord Privy Seal approximately how many hours during the last parliamentary Session were spent on Divisions of the House.

Mr. Biffen: There were 482 Divisions in Session 1983-84. No record of the exact timings of the length of Divisions is kept. On the assumption that each Division lasted 11½ minutes—the average time established from a sample of 36 Divisions in last Session—the House spent 92 hours 23 minutes on Divisions during the Session.

THE ARTS

Arts Council

Mr. Arnold asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts, in the light of the decision of the House on the Vote on Account for 1985-86, what is the total forward financial commitment made to date by the Arts Council in respect of the financial year 1985-86 (i) that has been discussed with arts bodies (ii) that is a firm contractual commitment and (iii) that is in any respect provisional; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: All discussions so far have been provisional and without commitment.

WALES

Tourism

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will collect and publish accurate statistics on an annual basis, showing the number of people employed in the tourism industry in Wales.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: In view of the impracticability of identifying those people whose employment depends solely upon tourism detailed information could not be produced on the basis requested. However, the triennial census of employment gives details of employment in catering and other tourist-oriented trades as well as figures for many other industries which serve tourists as well as local customers. While a research study on behalf of the Wales tourist board published in 1977 provides a basis for the board's current estimate that at least 90,000 are employed either directly or indirectly in tourism in Wales.

Population Projections

Mr. Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department liaises with area health authorities when producing population projections for the counties of Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No, but the Welsh Office discusses the migration assumptions used in such projections with the planning officers of the county councils. Summaries of the projections, with the offer of greater detail, are sent to health authorities.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions in the years 1981-82, 1982-83 and 1983-84 each of the Forestry Commission's regional advisory committees in Wales examined applications for grant or felling licences to which objections have been received; and in how many cases in each year in each conservancy the commissioners sought his views, following the regional advisory committee's failure to reconcile the views of the parties concerned.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: No applications for grant or felling licences were considered by Regional Advisory Committees in Wales in 1981-82 or in 1982-83. In 1983-84 two grant applications and one felling licence application were considered.

No case was referred to my right hon. Friend during the three years in question.

EMPLOYMENT

Skillcentres

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people are currently waiting for a place on a skillcentre course in Mersey and the north-west; and what is the average time involved in each case;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the current waiting time for a place on each separate course run at each skillcentre in Merseyside and in the north-west.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following tables list the average waiting times and the number of people on the waiting list for each course in the four Merseyside skillcentres, and in the eight other skillcentres in the north-west region.

Skillcentre waiting lists—Merseyside and the North West

Course	*Merseyside Skillcentre*							
	St. Helen's		*Liverpool*		*Runcorn*		*East Lancs*	
	Waiting time (months)	*Numbers*	*Waiting time (months)*	*Numbers*	*Waiting time (months)*	*Numbers*	*Waiting time (months)*	*Numbers*
Bricklaying	—	—	—	—	Z (see footnote)	13	4-5	7
Carpentry/Joinery	—	—	—	—	Suspended (see footnote)	9	9	17
Heating/Ventilation	—	—	6	1	Suspended	—	Suspended	—
Painting/Decorating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plastering	—	—	—	—	—	—	5-6	8
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	Suspended	4	—	—
Woodcutting Machining	—	—	—	—	Suspended	5	—	—

Course	Merseyside Skillcentre							
	St. Helen's		Liverpool		Runcorn		East Lancs	
	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers
Instrument Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Radio/TV Servicing	—	—	—	—	Suspended	2	—	—
General Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Domestic Appliance Servicing	6	5	—	—	—	—	6	5
Refrigeration/Air Conditioning	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sewing Machine Repair	1-2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Typewriter Repair	—	—	Immediate	4	—	—	—	—
Vocational Assessment (Women)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wider Opportunities Course	—	—	6	7	—	—	—	—
Furniture and Cabinet Making	—	—	Suspended	1	—	—	—	—
Mens Hairdressing	—	—	6	4	—	—	—	—
Sewing Machining	3	9	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electronic Office Skills	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Computers in Industry/Commerce	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electronics in Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Welding ASME IX Pipe	—	—	1-2	6	2	19	—	—
Welding Plate	—	—	*	4	—	—	—	—
Engineering Servicing		—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Draughtsmanship Electro/Mech	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Draughtsmanship Mec/Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Engineering Inspection	—	—	*	1	—	—	—	—
Fitting Pneumatic/Hydraulic	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Contractors' Plant Repair	—	—	*	1	—	—	3-4	1
Heavy Vehicle Repair	6	9	—	—	—	—	3-4	2
Motor Vehicle Body Repair/Spraying	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Vehicle Repair/Maintenance	—	—	*	2	—	—	9	12
Electrical Installation/Maintenance	—	—	*	1	—	—	4	12
Electronic Test/Service Mechanics	—	—	Suspended	10	Suspended	18	—	—
Group Engineering	—	—	2	7	—	—	—	—
Capstan Setter/Operator	—	—	—	—	Suspended	10	—	—
Centre Lathe Turning	—	—	—	—	Suspended	7	—	—
CNC Centre Lathe	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CNC Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Electrical	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting General Maintenance	—	—	—	—	Suspended	7	—	—
Fitting Machine Tool Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Pneumatic/Hydraulic	—	—	—	—	Suspended	9	Immediate	1
Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	Suspended	1	—	—
Precision Grinding	—	—	—	—	Suspended	3	—	—
Production Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plate Metal Fabrication	—	—	*	1	—	—	—	—
Sheet Metal Working	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Toolmaking Fitting/Machining	Immediate	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fabrication Welding (New Course)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	27	—	50	—	107	—	65

Note:

Merseyside, Liverpool (Kirkdale)

The Merseyside Advisory Training Unit in Kirkdale serves both adults and young people. It provides specialist assessment packages to assist jobseekers to prepare for work or for further training, and provides employers with suitable recruits at below full skills level.

A number of short courses are run and waiting times vary from 1 week to 2 months. The role of the centre would change significantly if Liverpool skillcentre were closed.

There are 60 on the waiting list at the moment.

Skillcentre waiting lists—Merseyside and the North West

Course	Skillcentre							
	Hindley		Hindley Annexe		Manchester Denton		Manchester (Trafford Park)	
	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers
Bricklaying	—	—	5	7	4	17	7	22
Carpentry/Joinery	Immediate	1	6	1	4	15	6	19
Heating/Ventilation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Painting/Decorating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plastering	*	—	—	—	4	13	6	14
Plumbing	*	4	4	2	4	13	6	4
Woodcutting Machining	5-6	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Instrument Maintenance	—	—	—	—	10	3	—	—
Radio/TV Servicing	4	11	—	—	—	—	Suspended	16
General Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Course	Skillcentre							
	Hindley		Hindley Annexe		Manchester Denton		Manchester (Trafford Park)	
	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers
Domestic Appliance Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Refrigeration/Air Conditioning	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sewing Machine Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	16
Typewriter Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	11
Vocational Assessment (Women)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wider Opportunities Course	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture and Cabinet Making	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mens Hairdressing	—	—	—	—	6	20	—	—
Sewing Machining	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electronic Office Skills	—	—	—	—	3	11	—	—
Computers in Industry/Commerce	—	—	—	—	2	6	—	—
Electronics in Industry	—	—	—	—	2	4	—	—
Welding ASME IX Pipe	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	8
Welding Plate	1	10	—	—	—	—	Suspended	9
Engineering Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Draughtsmanship Electro/Mech	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Draughtsmanship Mac/Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Engineering Inspection	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Pneumatic Hydraulic	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Contractors' Plant Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Heavy Vehicle Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	19
Motor Vehicle Body Repair/Spraying	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	9
Motor Vehicle Repair/Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	9
Electrical Installation/Maintenance	*	1	—	—	—	—	2	15
Electronic Test/Service Mechanics	—	—	—	—	—	—	7	3
Group Engineering	*	2	—	—	—	—	12+	19
Capstan Setter/Operator	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Centre Lathe Turning	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CNC Centre Lathe	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CNC Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting General Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Machine Tool Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Pneumatic/Hydraulic	—	—	—	—	—	—	1-2	5
Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Precision Grinding	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Production Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plate Metal Fabrication	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4
Sheet Metal Working	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Toolmaking Fitting/Machining	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fabrication Welding (New Course)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	33	—	10	—	104	—	193

Skillcentre waiting lists—Merseyside and the North West

Course	Skillcentre					
	Mary port		Preston		Rochdale	
	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers
Bricklaying	—	—	—	—	Immediate	2
Carpentry/Joinery	6	19	6	4	2	6
Heating/Ventilation	—	—	—	—	—	—
Painting/Decorating	—	—	4	6	—	—
Plastering	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plumbing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Woodcutting Machining	—	—	—	—	—	—
Instrument Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Radio/TV Servicing	—	—	Suspended	12	—	—
General Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Domestic Appliance Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Refrigeration/Air Conditioning	—	—	Immediate	16	—	—
Sewing Machine Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—
Typewriter Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—
Vocational Assessment (Women)	—	—	1	3	—	—
Wider Opportunities Course	—	—	—	—	—	—
Furniture and Cabinet Making	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mens Hairdressing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sewing Machining	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electronic Office Skills	—	—	—	—	—	—
Computers in Industry/Commerce	—	—	—	—	—	—

Course	Skillcentre					
	Mary port		Preston		Rochdale	
	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers	Waiting time (months)	Numbers
Electronics in Industry	—	—	—	—	—	—
Welding ASME IX Pipe	—	—	5	5	—	—
Welding Plate	Suspended	22	—	—	3	6
Engineering Servicing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Contractors' Plant Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—
Heavy Vehicle Repair	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motor Vehicle Body Repair/Spraying	—	—	—	—	3	2
Motor Vehicle Repair/Maintenance	Immediate	5	—	—	*	1
Electrical Installation/Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electrical Test/Service Mechanics	—	—	—	—	—	—
Group Engineering	Immediate	4	—	—	—	—
Capstan Setter/Operator	—	—	—	—	—	—
Centre Lathe Turning	—	—	—	—	—	—
CNC Centre Lathe	—	—	—	—	*	1
CNC Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Electrical	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting General Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Machine Tool Maintenance	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fitting Pneumatic/Hydraulic	—	—	—	—	—	—
Milling Setting/Operating	—	—	—	—	—	—
Precision Grinding	—	—	—	—	—	—
Production Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plate Metal Fabrication	—	—	3	1	—	—
Sheet Metal Working	—	—	—	—	—	—
Toolmaking Fitting/Machining	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fabrication Welding (New Course)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	50	—	47	—	18

Code Key: Z = Recruitment closed indefinitely
* = Course closed

Recruitment is temporarily suspended when the waiting list equals the numbers on a course.

Recruitment is closed indefinitely if a class is to be closed or transferred to another skillcentre. In those cases where a waiting list exists for a class which is closing, arrangements will be made to absorb those waiting elsewhere.

Tobacco and Cigarettes

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years a table showing the tobacco index, the all-items index and the percentage amount by which cigarette prices have been increased above the general rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is as follows:

	Retail prices index (January 1974=100)			Differential increase in price of cigarettes†
	Tobacco* (a)	All items (b)	Cigarettes (c)	
January				
1974	100·0	100·0	100·0	—
1975	124·0	119·9	123·5	3·6
1976	162·6	147·9	161·8	7·7
1977	193·2	172·4	192·4	2·3
1978	222·8	189	222·2	5·6
1979	231·5	207·2	230·9	−5·4
1980	269·7	245·3	269·9	−1·5
1981	296·6	277·3	296·9	−3·0
1982	392·1	310·6	393·2	20·4
1983	426·2	325·9	426·7	3·6
1984	450·8	342·6	451·3	0·6
October				
1984	504·0	357·7	486·3	3·3

* Includes other tobacco products in addition to cigarettes.

† Percentage amount by which the increase for cigarettes since previous January exceeds that for 'all items.'

The suggestion has been made from time to time that cigarettes should be excluded from the index, but a fundamental principle of its construction is that the coverage includes the whole range of goods and services on which households spend money. This principle has been followed since the inception of the index in 1947, and follows the recommendations of the Retail prices Index Advisory Committee. We accept that recommendation.

Enterprise Allowance

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons in *(a)* Northamptonshire and *(b)* Corby are in receipt of the enterprise allowance.

Mr. Alan Clark: The figures are not available in the form requested. However, in the Northampton area, which includes Corby, 306 people were receiving the enterprise allowance on 11 December 1984.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many youth training scheme places have *(a)* been filled and *(b)* remain vacant in Northamptonshire and in the Corby area at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of November, 1,742 youth training scheme places were filled in the county of Northamptonshire, of which 192 were in the Corby local authority district.

There were about 920 unfilled places in Northamptonshire at the same date, of which 160 were in Corby.

Wages Councils

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of the present members of the wages councils and their occupations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Each wages council has up to three independent members, appointed by my right hon. Friend, and a number of representative members, appointed in most cases by employers' associations and trade unions nominated for that purpose by my right hon. Friend.

Most representative members are either actively engaged as employers or workers in the industry concerned, or employed by the relevant employers' associations or trade unions. The names and occupations of the independent members are as follows:

Wages Council	*Independent member*	*Background/occupation*
Aerated Waters (Great Britain)	Dr. Sarah C. Orr, MA, PhD	Senior Lecturer
	Mr. J. J. Blackstock, OBE	Retired (formerly Industrial Relations Director)
	Mr. C. L. Hicks, MBE	Manager Industrial Relations
Boot and Shoe Repairing	Professor Sir John Wood, CBE, LLM	Professor
	Mrs. D. M. Kloss, LLM	Lecturer
	Mr. V. Brett, Grad.E.Mech.E.	Retired (formerly Industrial Management)
Button Manufacturing	Dr. O. Robinson, BSc, PhD	Senior Lecturer
	Miss D. Barrett, BA (Oxon)	Retired (formerly Chief Registrar/Director)
	Mrs. P. Fea	Former teacher
General Waste Materials Reclamation	Mrs. M. S. Gray, QC, MA	Barrister
	Mr. M. Kinchin-Smith, MA, FIPM	Personnel
	Mr. J. J. Hughes, BSc(Econ)	Senior Lecturer
Hairdressing Undertakings	Sir John Wordie, KB, CBE, MA, LLB	Barrister
	Mr. V. Edkins, MA(Eng)	Management Consultant
	Mrs. P. Jessel, MA(Oxon)	Lecturer
Hat, Cap and Millinery	Professor J. F. Wilson, MA	Professor
	Mrs. B. M. Smith, B Com	Lecturer
	Mrs. J. M. Paterson, MA, MIPM	Lecturer
Lace Finishing	Miss P. Burne, MA	Regional Director Open University
	Dr. N. S. Ross, OBE, MA, AMBIM	Senior Lecturer
	Dr. M. J. Stevenson, MA, PhD	Senior Lecturer
Laundry	Mrs. B. M. D. Smith, B Com	Lecturer in Economic Planning
	Mr. B. N. R. Reynolds, BA (Oxon), BCL	Barrister
	Mr. V. Brett, Grad.E.Mech.E.	Retired (formerly Industrial Management)
Clothing Manufacture	Sir John Wordie, KB, CBE, MA, LLB	Barrister
	Professor C. Blake, MA, PhD	Dean of Faculty
	Dr. O. Robinson, BSc, PhD	Senior Lecturer
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	Mr. A. D. Airth, BA	Senior Lecturer
	Mrs. P. Jessel, MA	Lecturer
	Mr. A. Lawrence, LLB	Principal Lecturer
Cotton Waste Reclamation	Mr. A. D. Airth, BA	Senior Lecturer
	Mrs. B. N. Rodgers, OBE, MA	Retired (formerly Senior Lecturer)
	Mrs. D. M. Kloss, LLM	Lecturer
Flax and Hemp	Professor M. Gaskin, MA	Professor
	Mr. J. T. Hughes, MA	Administrator
	Mrs. K. M. Bell, MA	Lecturer
Fur	Mr. J. G. Picton, CBE, M Com	Retired (formerly Senior Lecturer)
	Mr. J. C. Hall, MA, LLB, JP	Senior Tutor
	Miss J. F. Holgate, MA	Careers Advisory Officer
Licensed Non-Residential Establishment	Sir John Wordie, KB, CBE, MA, LLB	Barrister
	Mr. B. V. Moore, BA Dip, PM	Director, Personnel
	Mr. L. N. Anderton, MBE, JP	Industrial Relations Executive
Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant	Professor Sir John Wood, CBE, LLM	Professor
	Mr. A. I. Marsh, OBE, MA	Senior Research Fellow
	Mrs. B. M. D. Smith, B Com	Lecturer

Wages Council	*Independent member*	*Background/occupation*
Linen and Cotton—Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	Mr. H. M. Morris, JP, FIPM	Personnel Consultant
	Mr. A. D. Airth, BA	Senior Lecturer
	Mrs. J. Paterson, MA, MIPM	Lecturer
Made-up Textiles	Mrs. M. S. Gray, MA, QC	Barrister
	Professor G. H. Jones, LLM, MA, PhD	Professor
	Mr. D. W. A. Smith	Retired (formerly Personnel Director)
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower	(Vacant)	—
	Mrs. M. S. Gray, QC, MA	Barrister
	Mrs. P. Jessel, MA	Lecturer
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	Professor J. F. Wilson, MA	Professor
	Professor E. T. Nevin, MA, PhD	Professor
	Mr. M. Kinchin-Smith, MA, FIPM	Personnel
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	Professor M. Gaskin, DFC, MA, BA, FR Econ S	Professor
	Mr. D. Wallace Bell	Director
	Dr. O. Robinson, BSc, PhD	Senior Lecturer
Retail Food and Allied Trades	Mrs. M. S. Gray, QC, MA	Barrister
	Mr. H. H. Morris, JP, FIPM	Retired (formerly Personnel and Industrial Relations Manager)
	Mr. D. Churchill, BA	Journalist (Labour Correspondent)
Retail Trades (Non-Food)	Dr. S. C. Orr, MA, PhD	Senior Lecturer
	Mr. L. M. Patient	Chartered Accountant
	Miss B. Ream, BA, MIPM	Retired (formerly Senior Development Officer)
Rope, Twine and Net	Mr. L. Freedman, CBE	Formerly Chairman of a District Health Authority. Company Director
	Dame Rosemery Murray, DBE, MA, D Phil, JP	Retired (formerly President New Hall, Cambridge)
	Mr. A. Lawrence, LLB	Principal Lecturer
Sack and Bag	Mrs. B. M. D. Smith, B Com	Lecturer
	Miss J. F. Holgate, MA	Careers Advisory Officer
	Mr. B. N. R. Reynolds, BA (Oxon), BCL	Barrister
Toy Manufacturing	Mrs. M. S. Gray, QC, MA	Barrister
	Mr. A. Lawrence, LLB	Principal Lecturer
	Mr. D. G. Cox	Retired (formerly Senior Civil Servant)
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	(Vacant)	—
	Mr. T. P. Thomas, MA	Chartered Accountant
	Mrs. P. Fea	Former teacher

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will publish a table showing the principal awards made for adults and non-adults since 1 May 1981 and including awards due to come into effect at future dates by the wages councils for *(a)* hairdressing, *(b)* licensed non-residential establishments, *(c)* retail food and allied trades, *(d)* retail trades non-food and *(e)* unlicensed places of refreshment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Awards coming into effect on or after 1 May 1981, for the main negotiating grades for each specified council are as follows. No awards have yet been agreed for implementation at future dates.

(a) Hairdressing Undertakings Wages Council

	*Effective date of award**		
	12 April 1982	*11 April 1983*	*9 April 1984*
	£	£	£
Operative hairdresser after two years	57·00	61·00	64·80
Operative hairdresser after one year	53·00	56·50	59·90
Operative hairdresser 1st year	49·00	52·50	55·50
Apprentice 2nd year	31·00	32·40	33·90
Apprentice 1st year	27·50	29·00	30·40

*Rates for 40 hours.

(b) Licensed Non-Residential Establishment Wages Council

	Effective date of award*		
	15 January 1982	*15 January 1983*	*15 January 1984*
	£	£	£
Bar staff			
Regular workers†:			
18 years or over	60·50	63·50	65·91
Under 18 years	48·40	50·80	52·65

* Rates for 40 hours to 14 January 1984: 39 thereafter.
† Without lodgings provided by employer.

(c) Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council

	Effective date of award*			
	5 April 1982	*4 April 1983*	*3 October 1983*	*2 April 1984*
	£	£	£	£
General Assistant				
19 years or over	62·00	66·00	67·00	71·00
18 and under 19 years	52·45	55·83	56·68	60·06
17 and under 18 years	44·75	47·64	48·36	51·25
Under 17 years	39·05	41·57	42·20	44·72

* Rates for 40 hours to 2 January 1983: 39 thereafter.

(d) Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council

	Effective date of award*			
	5 April 1982	*4 April 1983*	*3 October 1983*	*2 April 1984*
	£	£	£	£
Skilled Assistant				
19 years or over	62·50	66·25	67·50	71·50
18 and under 19 years	53·13	56·32	57·38	60·78
17 and under 18 years	43·75	46·38	47·25	50·05
Under 17 years	37·50	39·75	40·50	42·90

*Rates for 40 hours to 2 January 1983: 39 thereafter.

(e) Unlicensed Place of Refreshment Wages Council

	Effective date of award*			
	15 June 1981	*14 June 1982*	*30 June 1983*	*13 June 1984*
	£	£	£	£
Group 4 workers†				
18 years or over	56·50	61·08	64·74	69·11
17 and under 18 years	42·38	45·82	48·56	51·83
Under 17 years	36·73	39·71	42·08	44·92

* Rates for 40 hours to 2 January 1983: 39 thereafter.
† Service cook, cashier, clerical assistant, refreshment bar attendent, buffet of service attendent, shop assistant and any other workers except waiter or waitress.

Departmental Information Service

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those categories in which the information service of his Department no longer provides statistics; why this change was made; if he will reconsider it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 6 December at columns *259-60*.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to change the rules of procedures upon which the industrial tribunals operate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. Regulations containing revised rules of procedure will be laid before both Houses of Parliament early in 1985, to come into operation on 1 March 1985.

The principal change in the rules will be to allow industrial tribunals to issue some written decisions in summary form, thus saving tribunal time, accelerating tribunal procedures and reducing legalism. However, this revised procedure will not apply where one of the parties to a case requests a full decision and in certain types of case specified in the rules such as those involving sex or race discrimination. In those cases, full decisions will continue to be provided as now.

The opportunity will also be taken to make certain minor technical amendments to the rules that experience has shown to be desirable and to consolidate the rules on the procedure to be adopted in equal value cases.

TRANSPORT

Members' Correspondence

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to selected Members of Parliament regarding the treatment of letters sent to him at the Department regarding the Government's policy on bus services.

Mr. Ridley: Following is the text of the letter:

"BUSES

Our proposals to introduce competition into local bus services will bring a major shift from the present, operator-orientated system, to one which puts the bus passenger and the customer first.

Not surprisingly many operators, their representative organisations and a number of councillors—particularly those with municipal bus undertakings—are agitating against our proposals. A substantial amount of ratepayers' money is now being spent on campaigns to discredit our plans, and there has already been a good deal of distortion. Some opponents, for example, have even stooped to frightening the elderly by saying that concessionary fares will end, and that rural dwellers will be cut off from their bus services.

In the light of this I thought that you might like to have a personal copy of the Department's leaflet which explains the new policy. You may already have had one for passing on to a constituent. Further copies are available from the Vote office.

You might also find the enclosed article useful in preparing speeches, press handouts or features for your local paper.

No doubt when your local press carry reports of any speech which you have made there will be opposing articles, or letters to the Editor, some of which you will want to reply to. If you need further information for that purpose, please let my know by writing to me at the Department of Transport. I will try to reply personally more quickly than I would normally be able to so that you can answer what has been written while it is still in readers' memories. If you need such an urgent reply, it would help if you could say so at the beginning of your letter.

I hope this will be helpful to you in winning the argument in your constituency."

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his practice in replying to letters from Members of Parliament on matters for which he is responsible; and what are his criteria for deciding priorities in replying to such letters.

Mr. Ridley: All letters sent to Ministers are dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total amount paid to metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council in transport supplementary grant in the current financial year for services and capital expenditure in categories which will not qualify for transport supplementary grant under the regulations which will apply in 1985-86 and subsequent years.

Mrs. Chalker: It is not possible to relate a particular amount of transport supplementary grant to particular categories of expenditure. This is because transport supplementary grant is a block grant and was paid in 1984-85 on the amount of accepted expenditure for each council which exceeded a threshold of £25·03 per head. The total amount of grant paid to the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council in 1984-85 was £247·72 million. The total of accepted expenditure was £902·8 million of which about £233 million relates to public transport in London, which is no longer the responsibility of the Greater London council, and £522 million relates to expenditure which would no longer be eligible for transport supplementary grant.

Road Communications (Birmingham—East Coast)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has made for improving road communications between Birmingham and the east coast ports.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government's trunk road programme contains a number of schemes for improving routes between Birmingham and the East Anglian ports. The most important is the proposed M1-A1 link road, into which a public inquiry is in progress, and which would complete a high-standard dual carriageway route from the M1-M6 junction to Ipswich. In addition, the western section of the Ipswich bypass is expected to open late in 1985; and a number of planned improvements to the A47 east of Leicester and the A11 north of Newmarket would cater for traffic to Great Yarmouth.

Buses (Deregulation)

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria can be used by local authorities to determine the scope for and scale of bus services which cannot be provided on a commercial basis if the policy outlined in the "Buses" White Paper is applied.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government propose to give local authorities powers to subsidise any bus service which they believe socially necessary but which is not provided commercially. It will be for local authorities to decide within their overall financial constraints which services they wish to support.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures under the headings: killed, severely injured and all severities, of the number of people, aged between 16 and 21 years, male and female, involved in road accidents while driving motor cycles and cars, respectively, for the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

Male and female two-wheeled motor vehicles and car drivers aged 16 to 21: Casualties in 1983

	Two-wheeled motor vehicle driver			*Car driver*		
	Male	*Female*	*All*	*Male*	*Female*	*All*
Fatal	437	14	451	188	34	222
Serious	9,541	1,037	10,578	2,551	699	3,250
Slight	20,708	3,128	23,836	8,497	3,629	12,126
All severities	30,686	4,179	34,865	11,236	4,362	15,598

Taxis and Minicabs (Accidents)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many taxi drivers and minicab drivers, and how many passengers in taxis and minicabs, have been killed and injured, respectively, in each of the last five years for which records are available.

Mrs. Chalker: In road accident and casualty reports, vehicle types are identified by their construction and not by their use at the time of the accident. Separate data of minicab driver and passenger casualties are therefore not available as private cars are generally used for this purpose.

The number of driver and passenger casualties reported to the police in vehicles constructed as taxis in the last three years was:

Driver and passenger casualties in taxis; 1981-83

	1981	*1982*	*1983*
Drivers			
Fatal	2	3	5
Serious	63	67	64
Slight	372	375	423
Passengers			
Fatal	5	6	1
Serious	99	109	117
Slight	813	854	947

I regret that data for further years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Forum Hope (Lost Cargo)

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied that enough is being done to recover the lost drums containing dangerous chemicals that fell off the general cargo vessel Forum Hope during 24 and 25 October, many of which have been washed up on British shores, and to ensure that cargoes are properly secured in British and European waterways.

Mr. David Mitchell: It was not until 19 November that it was possible to establish that the loss of some dangerous cargo from the Forum Hope, whilst entering the Bay of Biscay in severe weather conditions, could positively be linked to dangerous goods arriving on the south coast. By this time many containers had already washed up although not all have yet been identified as Forum Hope cargo. In situations such as this it is not normal practice to attempt to find and recover lost packages at sea. Local authorities have been given advice on the identity of the contents and the source of the packages both to assist them in their responsibility for disposal and to enable them to attempt to recover their costs from the shipowners should they so wish.

The proper securing of cargoes on board ship is the responsibility of the master. In the United Kingdom this duty is covered by the Merchant Shipping (Load Lines) (Deck Cargo) Regulations 1968 which are enforced by my surveyors during spot-check inspections. However, the majority of ships in British and European waterways are of foreign flag and have loaded their cargoes in other than British ports. A review of cargo securing methods and equipment is presently under discussion at the International Maritime Organisation. It is expected that internationally agreed improved guidelines will be published in the coming year.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Transport, further to the statement in section 8.9 of the review in "Road Accidents Great Britain 1983", on what basis his Department is considering a reassessment of road accident costs for pain, grief and suffering.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department is considering whether recent studies which sought to establish what people are willing to pay to reduce their risks of injury or death provide a basis for costing accidents.

Vehicle Testing

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish figures for each year since 1979 relating to (i) the number of Ministry of Transport tests carried out on cars, (ii) the number of cars which failed the Ministry of Transport test, (iii) the number of cars which failed the Ministry of Transport test partly or wholly as a result of having illegal tyres and (iv) the number of persons prosecuted for being in possession of a car with illegal tyres.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall answer the question shortly.

GLC (Transport Surveys)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the last year consultants working for his Department and research workers funded by his Department have used *(a)* information collected by the Greater London council in its 1971 and 1981 transport surveys; and *(b)* forecasts of travel by public and private modes produced by the Greater London Council transport studies section.

Mrs. Chalker: The Department does not keep, and I do not believe that we could justify keeping records in a form that would provide an answer to the hon. Member's question.

Car Test Centres

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated value of the capital assets of his Department's car test centres.

Mrs. Chalker: I regret that the information which my hon. Friend asks for is not available. The national network of L test centres has not previously been valued in this way. I am considering this matter at present.

Stay Low Campaign

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what discussions took place between his Department and representatives or agents of the drinks industry prior to the introduction of the Stay Low campaign on drinking and driving;

(2) what discussions took place between his Department and representatives of temperance organisations prior to the introduction of the Stay Low campaign on drinking and driving.

Mrs. Chalker: There were no such discussions.

Drink-Driving Campaigns

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what statistical or other evidence is available to his Department regarding the success or lack of success of previous campaigns designed to discourage drinking and driving during the festive season.

Mrs. Chalker: The Department has two main sources of information available to assess the effect of previous campaigns on this subject. Specially designed surveys have been conducted before and after each campaign to determine any changes in peoples' attitudes to drinking and driving and the risks involved, while casualty figures have also been analysed for any changes

An assessment of the campaigns' effect has been made in "Road Accidents Great Britain" each year since 1977. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions took place between his Department and the drink industry in 1983 and 1984 on the issue of the participation of that industry in campaigns designed to curb the consumption of alcohol by drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1983 my Department met the Brewers Society on a number of occasions to advise on the technical content of three road safety films to which the society was providing financial support. These films, developed by the road safety education unit at Reading university with the assistance of ROSPA, are designed to make young people more aware of the dangers involved in drinking and driving.

In May this year I attended the Brewers Society's press launch of these films where I expressed my hope that the drinks industry as a whole would continue to lend its support to efforts aimed at reducing the incidence of drinking and driving. I am glad to say that the society yesterday launched a nationwide campaign "Don't gamble with your licence", the theme of which is designed to support the Department's own campaign.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultants have been appointed to consider London's road network in the period after the proposed abolition of the Greater London council.

Mrs. Chalker: I sent the hon. Member details of the consultants appointed to carry out assessments of the long-standing problems of four major traffic corridors in London at the time these studies were announced. I am unclear what other studies he has in mind.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Beaumont-Dark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce legislation providing relief from capital gains tax on an exchange of interests in land in the joint beneficial ownership of two or more persons.

Mr. Moore: There have been representations over a long period that the tax charge in these circumstances can give rise to hardship. I have therefore authorised the Inland Revenue to introduce an extra-statutory concession which will enable the capital gains tax to be deferred until the disposal of the interest in land acquired as a result of the exchange. This will apply to exchanges which are made after today. The detailed terms of the concession are included in an Inland Revenue press release published today.

It may be possible in due course to legislate on this matter, but in the meantime this is an appropriate way of ensuring that relief is not denied to a very small group of taxpayers where the present law operates unfairly. Detailed information is not available to estimate the cost of this concession, but it is likely to be small.

Customs and Excise Staff (Weymouth Port)

Viscount Cranborne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons on the staff of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Weymouth port have particular responsibility for matters that might endanger public health, such as the smuggling of live animals from abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: None. The total number of officers employed on customs work in Weymouth port is 35·5 including eight Customs/VAT staff employed seasonally. Their duties embrace all customs duties, including the enforcement of a number of import restrictions and prohibitions of which the prevention of smuggling of live animals from abroad is one. It is impossible to attribute specific numbers of staff to enforcement of these restrictions and prohibitions.

Viscount Cranborne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has recently received from the Weymouth port health authority concerning the manning of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise service in Weymouth.

Mr. Hayhoe: None, although the Weymouth port health authority wrote in January 1980 and April 1984 to the local management of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. On both occasions reassurance was given that the possibility of animals being illegally imported was a factor taken into account in fixing staffing levels and controls at Weymouth.

Viscount Cranborne asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the staffing levels of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Weymouth port in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: The staffing levels on 31 March for the last five years were:

Year	Staff	Including Customs/VAT staff
1980	47	12
1981	47	12
1982	47	7
1983	35·5	8
1984	35·5	8

Because there are seasonal fluctuations in work, a number of the staff as shown work on customs duties in the summer and VAT in the winter.

Tax Yields

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total tax yield, specific ad valorem and value added tax, in terms of European currency units in each of the EEC countries per 1,000 cigarettes as at 1 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The nearest date to 1 October for which information is available is 11 November 1984. I understand the situation to be as follows:

Excise duty

(ECUs)

	Specific	Ad valorem*	VAT*	Total tax yield
Belgium	1·88	32·69	3·01	37·58
Denmark	66·68	30·16	25·13	121·97
France	1·16	14·12	7·95	23·23
Germany	25·35	26·00	10·05	61·40
Greece	0·71	11·06	1·0	12·77
Italy	0·37	25·60	7·79	33·76
Ireland	40·77	15·11	18·35	74·23
Luxembourg	1·44	24·51	2·56	28·51
Netherlands	11·89	27·19	11·44	50·51
United Kingdom	41·6	21·69	13·47	76·76

Source: EC Commission

* Calculated on the selling price of cigarettes in the most popular price category for each country.

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the tax yield to the Exchequer including value added tax, on the taxation of tobacco products in each financial year since 1979-80 in real terms; what is his estimate for 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is estimated that the yield from excise duties and value added tax on tobacco products, at 1983-84 prices, was as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	4,400
1980-81	4,300
1981-82	4,650
1982-83	4,400
1983-84	4,600

The estimate for excise duty on tobacco products for the year 1984-85 is £4,100 million. An estimate for value added tax is not available.

VAT

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further representations he has received about the value added tax treatment of children's shoes.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 13 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King). A number of further letters have been received since then.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield of value added tax on advertising in books, periodicals and newspapers.

Mr. Hayhoe: Advertising in periodicals and newspapers is zero-rated. Advertising in books is taxable at the standard rate of 15 per cent.

If value added tax were to be applied at the standard rate to advertising in newspapers, journals and periodicals, it is estimated that the net revenue yield would be up to £25 million in 1984-85. The current yield from advertising in books is negligible.

Excise Products

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in the *Official Report* the budgetary increases, in retail terms, imposed on excise products, cigarettes, petrol, beer, spirits and wine, and the changes in consumption in 1979 and in the latest year for which he has figures, in real and percentage terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The increase in the prices of typical retail packs, including consequential value added tax, resulting from the June 1979 and March 1984 Budgets, were of the following order:

(pence)

	1979*	1984
Cigarettes (packet of 20)	+6	+10
Petrol (gallon)	+10	+4½
Beer (pint)	+3	+2
Spirits (75cl bottle at 40% vol.)	+30	+10
Wine (70cl bottle of table wine)	+10	−18
(70cl bottle of sherry)	+11	+10

* Increase due to raising the rate of VAT.
No effective duty changes.

For consumption, I assume my hon. Friend refers to changes compared to the previous 12 months for the years in question. The information, derived from Customs and Excise statistics of quantities charged with excise duty released into domestic consumption, is as follows:

Change in quantities released into consumption over the previous 12 months

	1979 Actual change	Percentage change	1984* Actual change	Percentage change
Cigarettes	−1·2 (billions)	−0·9	+3·3 (billions)	+3·3
Light oil (mainly petrol)	−0·6 (billion litres)	−2·3	+0·6 (billion litres)	+2·4
Beer	+0·4 (million hectolitres)	+0·7	−0·4 (million hectolitres)	−0·6
Spirits	+97·7 ('000 hectolitres of alcohol)	+10·2	+24·5 ('000 hectolitres of alcohol)	+2·7
Wine of fresh grapes	+0·3 (million hectolitres)	+9·5	+0·6 (million hectolitres)	+12·1

* Provisional figures for year ending 30 September.

Cigarettes

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years a table showing the number of home produced cigarettes, the number of imported cigarettes and total consumption and the budget/regulation increase in cigarette taxation in pence per 20 cigarettes excluding value added tax and ad-valorem taxation payable on manufacturers' price increases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Following is the information:

Cigarettes released for home consumption and cigarette taxation increases

	Cigarettes released for consumption*			Budget/ regulator increases in taxation on 20 typically-priced king size cigarettes†
	Home produced	Imported	Total	
	billions	billions	billions	pence
1987	—	—	—	8·5
1976	—	—	—	0·5
1977	124·4	0·5	124·9	‡
1978	124·2	1·4	125·7	Nil
1979	122·7	1·9	124·5	6
1980	122·0	2·0	124·0	5
1981	108·3	1·5	109·8	‖
1982	100·6	1·8	102·4	5
1983	100·6	2·0	102·6	3
1984	—	—	—	10

* Official statistics have been collected only since 1976.

† Estimated before 1978 because excise duty was until then charged on leaf tobacco used in manufacture and not exclusively on finished products.

‡ 4 January/4 April.

‖ 14 March/3 July.

Sterling Exchange Rate

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for each month since May 1979, the rate of exchange between pound sterling and the central reference point of the exchange rate mechanism together with its percentage deviation from that point.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information required is as follows:

*Sterling/European currency unit exchange rate (end-month rates): percentage change from notional central rate**

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
January	—	+2·55	+20·22	+6·50	−9·28	+2·75
February	—	+4·34	+16·50	−0·43	−10·63	+1·59
March	—	+7·22	+0·47	−0·23	+0·81	−1·80
April	—	+4·92	+1·27	−2·37	+6·35	−0·44
May	+3·98	+7·36	+2·55	−2·00	+4·06	−0·85
June	+5·26	+6·50	−0·35	+1·49	+0·63	−1·16
July	+7·79	+6·82	−2·11	+1·29	+3·45	−0·83
August	+7·39	+9·18	−2·18	+1·96	+3·83	−0·75
September	+0·22	+9·67	−8·69	+1·91	+2·09	−1·15
October	−1·67	+14·82	+2·42	+2·26	+2·11	−3·08
November	−0·13	+13·33	+5·92	−3·18	+2·43	−2·60
December	+0·38	+15·62	+5·55	−7·11	+2·81	—

* The notional central rates for sterling against the European currency unit used in the calculations are as follows:

from 14 March 1979	0·66325
from 24 September 1979	0·64982
from 30 November 1979	0·64891
from 23 March 1981	0·54212
from 5 October 1981	0·60105

from 22 February 1982	0·55704
from 14 June 1982	0·56045
from 21 March 1983	0·62985
from 17 May 1983	0·58709
from 17 September 1984	0·58599

Savings Ratio (Statistics)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the annual increase in the savings ratio since 1982 for the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden; and what has been the corresponding increase in manufacturing output, the money supply and retail prices.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Figures from national sources for personal saving ratios in United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany in 1982 and 1983 are shown in the table. It should be noted that definitions vary widely across countries. Data on manufacturing output, money supply and retail prices for the United Kingdom are published in the CSO's *Economic Trends*. Comparable figures for Germany and Sweden are available in the OECD's monthly "Main Economic Indicators".

Personal Savings Ratio
(percentage of personal disposable income)

	1982	*1983*
United Kingdom	13·0	11·0
Germany	14·0	12·5
Sweden	0·5	0·0

Tobacco and Related Industries (Taxation)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the implications for employment in the tobacco and associated industries of an increase in taxation of 5p, 10p, 15p, 20p, and 25p, respectively, per packet of 20 cigarettes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Increases of this kind could be expected to lead to reductions in the consumption of cigarettes and thus to a lower level of production for the home market. But taxation of cigarettes is only one of a number of factors involved and it is not possible to determine the precise effects of such increases on employment in the tobacco and associated industries.

Royal Mint

Mr. Merchant asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated value of the Royal Mint as a trading concern.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Bank Interest

Mr. Beaumont-Dark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the implications for Scottish partnerships of the composite rate scheme for bank interest introduced by the Finance Act 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes. The composite rate scheme introduced by the Finance Act 1984 comes into effect on 6 April 1985. From that date, banks and other deposit-takers are required to account to the Inland Revenue for tax at the composite rate on interest paid or credited on "relevant deposits". Broadly, these are deposits where the person beneficially entitled to any interest on them is an individual or, where two or more persons are so entitled, all of them are individuals.

The Inland Revenue has recently received legal advice to the effect that where interest arises on deposits belonging to a Scottish partnership, it is the partnership which is beneficially entitled to the interest, and not the individual partners, and the partnership is not "an individual". This means that the interest of a Scottish partnership would not be subject to composite rate tax, unlike interest belonging to partnerships of individuals elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As the intention is that the composite rate scheme should apply uniformly throughout the United Kingdom, we propose to put Scottish partnerships on to the same statutory footing as other partnerships for composite rate purposes, with effect from the start of the scheme on 6 April 1985.

Civil Service Dispute (Cost)

Mr. Williams asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the final cost to the Treasury in interest paid on money borrowed to make good the revenue delayed during the Civil Service dispute of 1981; for how long an interest cost was incurred; and what estimate he has made of revenue permanently lost.

Mr. Lawson: It is estimated that interest on extra borrowing resulting from the Civil Service dispute amounted to about £700 million up to the end of March 1983. Reasonable estimates of interest costs beyond March 1983 cannot be made because it is not possible to distinguish revenue "recovery" directly associated with the dispute, on which the interest cost depends, from delays due to other factors.

Revenue permanently lost as a result of the dispute cannot be separately identified within the totals of revenue written off as irrecoverable for other reasons.

Mr. Jack Lacey

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government were *(a)* aware of, *(b)* consulted about and *(c)* agreed to the visit made by Mr. Jack Lacey, who claimed to be from United States Customs, to Plasma Technology in Avon on 16 July.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *65*]: *(a)* No; *(b)* No; *(c)* No.

Oil Taxation

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average percentage tax take per barrel of oil in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Norway.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *66*]: Tax—including royalties—payable on oil and gas production in 1983 from the United Kingdom sector of the North sea is estimated to have been about 55 per

cent. of gross revenues. I regret that this figure cannot be apportioned between oil and gas. Comparable figures for Norway are not available.

EC (Payments)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the sum which the United Kingdom will have paid to the Common Market, net of any repayments, during the calendar year 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984]: The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net payments to European Community Institutions in 1984-85 and later years will be published in the next public expenditure White Paper. The calendar year is not an accounting period for purposes of United Kingdom expenditure and annual figures for United Kingdom payments by calendar year are therefore available only in arrears.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries which have *(a)* not signed the law of the sea convention and *(b)* signed but not yet ratified the convention.

Mr. Rifkind: *(a)* The following countries have not signed the United Nations law of the sea convention:

Albania, Ecuador, Federal Republic of Germany, Holy See, Jordan, Kiribati, Israel, Peru, San Marino, Syrian Arab Republic, Tonga, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Venezuela, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

(b) The following countries have signed but not ratified the convention:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burkina, Burma, Burundi, Byelorussia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Cambodia, North Korea, Democratic Yemen, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, German Democratic Republic, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, USSR, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zimbabwe.

Other entities which signed the convention are Cook Islands, the European Economic Community and Niue.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the votings at the review conference under the United Nations convention on the law of the sea 15 years after commercial mining commenced is proposed to be by simple majority or some other system.

Mr. Rifkind: It is proposed that no voting should take place until all efforts of achieving a consensus have been exhausted. If there is no consensus, decisions on adoption of amendments are to be taken by a three fourths majority.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will identify every proposal and idea that Her Majesty's Government have put forward to improve the United Nations convention on the law of the sea giving the date on which this was done.

Mr. Rifkind: At the 1984 spring session of the Preparatory Commission, the United Kingdom delegation put forward our general position in four statements. These were made on 21 March, 22 March, 23 March and 5 April.

At the 1984 summer session of the Preparatory Commission the delegates of the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands put forward more specific proposals and suggestions.

I have today placed copies of the relevant statements and documents in the Library of the House.

Treaties and Conventions (Ratification)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all treaties and conventions which Her Majesty's Government have signed but not ratified, giving in each case the reason for non-ratification.

Mr. Renton: The information is not readily available and could be extracted from the records only at disproportionate cost. If my hon. Friend can indicate a particular subject or period to be researched, I shall be pleased to see what can be done to provide the information.

Namibia

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, as a member of the Contact Group, Her Majesty's Government are currently involved in discussions with the other four member states in the group to seek a solution of the Namibian independence problem.

Mr. Rifkind: We keep in close touch with our Contact Group partners over developments in the current negotiations towards a Namibia settlement. Although we are not actively involved at present, we will, of course, take any further action which we consider would contribute constructively to the negotiations and hasten implementation of Security Council resolution 435.

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the exact cost of the recent United Nations Namibia conference held in Bangkok, Thailand; why it was held in Thailand; and if Her Majesty's Government supported this conference in any way.

Mr. Renton: The additional cost resulting from holding the United Nations Namibia conference in Thailand in May this year is estimated by the United Nations Secretariat to be US$570,000. The United

Kingdom was opposed to additional financial provision for the conference in Bangkok, on the grounds that this would result in unacceptably high costs, and constituted a departure from the principle that United Nations bodies should normally meet at their established headquarters.

Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any request, since 29 November, either orally or in writing, that Yasser Arafat should be permitted to enter the United Kingdom in the near future, notwithstanding the abandonment of his recent proposed visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such request.

BBC External Services

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the report he has recently received on the efficiency and effectiveness of the British Broadcasting Corporation external services.

Mr. Renton: I have nothing to add at present to the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 12 December at column *513*.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mrs. Rumbold asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the 17-18 December Foreign Affairs Council.

Mr. Rifkind: With my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade I represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council which met in Brussels on 17-18 December. Ministerial conferences with Portugal and Spain and a meeting of the EC/Cyprus Association Council were held in the margins.

The Council agreed to sign pre-accession and automobile protocols with Portugal. Ministers approved declarations on fisheries and wine for presentation to Spain and Portugal.

At the ministerial conference with Portugal, the Community and Portugal reviewed progress.

At the ministerial conference with Spain, considerable progress was made in settling the outstanding industrial questions. Agreement was finally reached between Spain and the Community on arrangements for the dismantlement of Spain's protectionist tariff regime. Spanish tariffs will be cut by 52 per cent. by the end of the first three years of a seven years' overall transitional period. In addition, there will be a reduced duty quota for cars, set at 32,000 units in the first year rising to 40,000 in the third year, at a tariff of 17·4 per cent. The new quota for cars will in its first year be more than twice the size of the existing quotas — which is at higher rates of duty — and offers considerable further improvements in the later years. The settlement will offer substantially improved opportunities to United Kingdom exporters.

The Community and Spain also reached agreement on arrangements aimed at ensuring that Spain's plans for restructuring its steel industry enable it to become viable without state support no more than three years after accession. For as long as aid to the Spanish industry continues, Spanish sendings of steel to the Community will continue to be restrained. Disruption to the Community's steel market will thus be prevented. Agreement was also reached with Spain, ad referendum on the Spanish side, on the institutions chapter.

Ministers discussed arrangements for implementing the Fontainebleu conclusions in respect of new own resources. Work will continue on the text of the new own resources decision.

There was a further discussion on Community action in response to the famine in Africa. Commission proposals for financing the commitment made at the European Council in Dublin to supply 1·2 million tonnes of cereals to drought affected African countries between now and the next harvest were approved.

As not all member states will ratify the treaty amending Greenland's status by 1 January 1985, the Council considered the need for interim arrangements. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to give effect to Greenland's withdrawal from the Community from 1 January. Fisheries aspects are being considered further at the Fisheries Council on 19 December.

Ministers briefly discussed the proposal for integrated Mediterranean programmes — IMPs. A number of member states, including the United Kingdom, reiterated their view that the existing proposals were inappropriate and contrary to the conclusions of the March European Council. The Commission agreed to reflect on the need for an amended proposal.

The Commission reported to that Council that agreement had been reached with Canada for a revised EC/GATT-bound newsprint quota of 650,000 tonnes.

The Commission also reported on the ministerial discussions between the Community and the United States of America, which were held on the 13-14 December.

At the EC/Cyprus Association Council meeting, the Community confirmed its commitment to eventual customs union with Cyprus and told the Government of Cyprus that it intends to define negotiating directives in 1985.

PRIME MINISTER

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister what representations she has received from the deputy chairman of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society concerning the future of the Liverpool philharmonic hall; what reply she has sent; and if she will make a statement.

The Lord Privy Seal: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has received a letter from the Deputy Chairman of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society on Friday 7 December. My right hon. Friend has asked my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts to consider the issues raised in that letter. He will reply in due course.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to her answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *546*, whether she has anything to add to that reply in

respect of the role to be played by the Secretary of State for the Environment in determining the Stansted applications.

The Lord Privy Seal: I have been asked to reply.

Only to repeat that, although legally and constitutionally the decisions about Stansted will be taken jointly by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has a home near Stansted, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction will act for him in the decision-making process.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Staff)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the number of people employed by local authorities in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales on administering the rent and rates rebates in June 1982 and the number of people employed by local authorities in (i) England and (ii) Wales currently employed on administering the housing benefit scheme for the most recent month available.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information requested is not available centrally.

Housing Associations

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to amend the way in which the general needs index is used as the formula for establishing funding levels for housing associations.

Sir George Young: The composition of the generalised needs index and the way it is used to allocate resources to local authorities is reviewed each year with the local authority associations. The level of funding for housing associations within their allocations is a matter for individual local authorities.

The Housing Corporation uses a modified form of the generalised needs index to allocate 70 per cent. of the resources for new fair rent projects each year to its regions. The Housing Corporation and the National Federation of Housing Associations are both conducting major reviews of the way the generalised needs index is used by the corporation.

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet completed his examination of the scope for restoring eligibility for housing association grant (mini-HAG) to short life properties in local authority ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made on 14 December, at column 1338, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction in the course of his speech in the debate on homelessness.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the purpose and timetable of the review of housing association management allowances.

Sir George Young: The management allowance is one of a number of allowances made to housing associations intended to meet their costs in the management, maintenance and development of properties. The appropriateness of all allowances is considered annually. The special review of the management allowance, which is being conducted in collaboration with the National Federation of Housing Associations is considering among other things, whether the allowance should reflect the effects of the scale of associations' operations.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of jobs estimated to be lost or gained following the review of housing association management allowances; and what he estimates will be the impact on services following the review.

Sir George Young: The effect and benefits of any changes in the current allowances are among the issues which will be considered by the review, which is not yet completed.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he has received criticising the time scale of the review of housing association management allowances; and if he will allow more time for consultation in the review.

Sir George Young: None.

Housing Action Areas

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take, under the Housing Act 1974, against authorities which have declared and established housing action areas but have subsequently not provided a full home improvement grant to owners of properties in such areas.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no powers to take such action. It is for individual local authorities to decide how much to allocate to home improvement grants from within the total resources available to them.

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what services residents of housing action areas and general improvement areas can normally expect as a result of their declaration and over what period; and what are the overall objectives of such declarations.

Sir George Young: The overall objectives are to secure a significant improvement in resident's living conditions by concentrating resources within defined areas. Special measures available to local authorities are powers to carry out or assist environmental works, powers of compulsory acquisition and improvement, enhanced rates of improvement grant and, in HAAs, enveloping. General improvement areas have no time limit, but local authorities are expected to consider termination when conditions are substantially improved. HAAs have a five-year life; this duration may be extended for two years, provided my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not intervene.

International Garden Festival Site, Liverpool

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is yet in a position to indicate what will be the future of the International Garden Festival site in Liverpool.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Merseyside Development Corporation's long-term plans for the International Garden

Festival site remain unchanged. Forty five acres of parkland and gardens, together with the promenade, Britannia inn, festival hall and arena are to be retained for public use. The development corporation is currently considering how this commitment can best be implemented should the city council decide it is unable to take over the site itself as orginally envisaged. I hope that a firm decision will be forthcoming from the city council very soon.

In addition, for 1985 only, the MDC is finalising plans to open a substantial part of the remainder of the site. This land will ultimately be developed in accordance with the development corporation's strategy for the Riverside area.

Local Government Elections (Candidates)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider introducing legislation to disqualify local authority employees and employees of organisations obtaining more than 50 per cent. of their funding from local government from being eligible to stand as candidates in local authority elections.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary have at present no plans for legislation in this particular area.

Housing Improvement (Rugby)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the number of houses in Rugby in urgent need of modernisation; and what funds his Department has made available in the current year for housing improvement in Rugby.

Sir George Young: Rugby borough council provided details about the conditions of the housing stock as at 1 April 1984 in its housing investment programme return, which is available in the Library.

The district council has received an enhanced housing investment programme allocation of £5·1 million in 1984-85; this is in recognition of particular problems present in a substantial proportion of the council's housing stock. The single block system for local authority expenditure allows authorities flexibility in ordering priorities in the use of their capital allocation.

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the future of the Liverpool Philharmonic hall if Merseyside county council is abolished; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The deputy chairman of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society copied to me the letter he sent to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on this matter, and I have received a number of other copies forwarded by hon. Members. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal.

Corby

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many schemes have been approved for the clearance of derelict land in the Corby development area in 1983-84 and 1984-85 to date; what was their area; and how much grant was payable.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In addition to ongoing works, 100 per cent. grant has been agreed for the acquisition by Corby district council for reclamation of further areas of the former steelworks—8 hectares in 1983-84 at a cost of £107,000 and 15 hectares in 1984-85 costing £190,000. The continuing scheme, including these approvals, to reclaim part of the former steelworks site, and to provide basic on-site infrastructure now covers 142·5 hectares. Total expenditure of over £9 million has been approved since 1981, £3·3 million of which was incurred in 1983-84. For 1984-85 £3·5 million has been made available.

GLC (Rate Expenditure)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an analysis of the Greater London council's budgeted rate fund net current expenditure broken down by service for each service to be transferred from the Greater London council to the London boroughs and other bodies including the Fire Board, Thames Water authority, London Planning Commission, Thamesmead trust, Historic Building Commission, Lee Valley regional park authority, residuary body, Sports Council, Arts Council, Inner London education authority, shire counties and shire districts.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 3 December, at column 71, to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

GLC (Housing Stock)

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the Greater London council has responsibility for renovating the housing stock transferred to the London boroughs and district councils, when those responsibilities were imposed upon it; and under what terms.

Sir George Young: The Greater London council agreed to accept certain liabilities for the renovation and repair of the transferred stock as part of the terms of the housing transfer orders 1980-83, and agreed to meet part of the costs involved.

GLC Seaside and Country Homes

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the information he has concerning rents and standards of management and maintenance in Greater London council seaside and country homes.

Sir George Young: Such data are not held centrally, while the Greater London council does not provide housing revenue account information at this level of detail in its budget statement.

Cleanaway Ltd. (Waste Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why information was sought from the Greater London council on the renewal of the contract with Cleanaway Limited for the landfill disposal of solid waste

at Stone, Dartford, Kent; and why there has been delay in granting consent under provisions of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984.

Mr. Waldegrave: The delay was the result of the GLC's failure to supply basic information necessary to enable proper consideration to be given to its application. Consent has now been given.

Woodlands

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to ensure that ancient semi-natural woodlands, listed in the inventories compiled by the Nature Conservancy Council, are not destroyed by development.

Mr. Waldegrave: Protection of those woodlands against development is mainly provided through the development control and tree preservation order systems operated by local authorities, and by the felling licence system operated by the Forestry Commission. Some also have further protection under the site of special scientific interest procedures. I understand that the Nature Conservancy Council expects to complete the inventories for England and Wales within three years, and that the council is considering proposals for the long-term protection and management of the listed woodlands in conjunction with the Forestry Commission. The Forestry Commission's "Broadleaves in Britain" May 1984 consultative paper contained proposals concerning protection and management of these woodlands, and these are being considered.

Northern Ireland (Prefabricated Housing)

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the quality of prefabricated units supplied by contractors to the Property Services Agency in Northern Ireland, in the light of allegations made in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 31 October.

Mr. Gow: I have seen the statement made by Mr. Beattie in the Northern Ireland Assembly and I have had the circumstances investigated fully. Mr. Beattie alleged that certain portable accommodation units supplied by contractors to the agency were substandard, that because these contractors were hoping to get away with substandard work they won tenders unfairly, and that there must have been collusion with PSA officials to allow them to hope to get away with substandard work. The facts are that some of the units supplied by the contractors were substandard and are now being replaced. There is no evidence that they won tenders unfairly, or that there was any collusion with PSA staff.

Asbestos Cement

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy of the Property Services Agency about safety aspects relating to the use of asbestos cement in the refurbishing of public buildings.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. 96]: Our general policy on all asbestos-containing material relates to asbestos-cement material and can be summarised as follows:

(i) to reduce the risk of exposure to asbestos dust to the minimum reasonably practicable.

(ii) to ensure that persons are not exposed to dust levels in excess of HSE control limits.

(iii) not to use *(a)* any products containing blue or brown asbestos *(b)* sprayed asbestos insulation or lagging *(c)* any asbestos based materials solely for thermal insulation or acoustic purposes or *(d)* any other asbestos-based materials before considering the use of substitute materials.

(iv) to ensure that any work on asbestos-containing materials is carried out by approved contractors or competent PSA staff in strict accordance with Statutory Regulations and Approved Codes of Practice.

(v) all known asbestos-containing materials to be recorded in a register and inspected at regular intervals.

If a building which was being refurbished contained asbestos-cement material the material would be checked to determine its condition. Then either:

(i) If it were decided that it needed to be removed, either because it was sufficiently damaged to release fibres into the atmosphere or as part of the general work of refurbishment, it would be removed in accordance with good safety factors and all statutory requirements.

(ii) If found to be in good condition and not required to be removed as part of the refurbishment details would be entered in the register, if this has not been already done, and regular checks carried out.

In deciding whether an asbestos-cement product should be incorporated into the building during refurbishment the possibility of using an alternative non-asbestos substitute would first be considered. In making such a decision possible health hazards would be weighed against the relative merits of the two materials with regard to the properties required for the particular application, such as the degree of flamability.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will publish in the *Official Report* an estimate on the best available information to hand of the cost to the Exchequer of producing an average lowland and highland sheep, respectively, taking account of the various subsidies and deficiency payments, including the guaranteed price for wool; and how this compares with the average carcase price realiseed at auctions.

Mr. MacGregor: Information in the form requested is not readily available since a large proportion of sheep and lambs produced in the hills and uplands are marketed for further breeding and fattening in the lowland areas. Information from the farm management survey indicates, however, that grants and subsidies, excluding investment aids, accounted on average for some 70 per cent. of net farm income of hill and upland cattle and sheep farms in England in 1982-83. For lowland cattle and sheep farms the proportion was some 40 per cent.

Food and Environment Bill

Mr. Skeet asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to ensure that drafts of regulations to be made under the Food and Environment Bill will be available to right hon. and hon. Members before the Committee stage of the Bill in this House.

Mr. Jopling: No. I am concerned that the publication of draft regulations would prejudge the outcome both of the House's deliberations and of further consultations with other interested parties. However, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State has already provided a

statement of intention about the regulations in another place, and I shall ensure that this is available to hon. Members.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Winnick asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *295*, where the other intervention stores for surplus EEC agriculture produce are sited; and what is the amount of food stored, broken down into each class of produce.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 December 1984 c.*624*]:

At 30 November the position was as follows:

Location	*Quantity (Tonnes)*
Butter	
Aberdeen	467
Augher	961
Ballygawley	69
Ballymena	274
Banbridge	3,510
Belfast	3,073
Bristol	12,238
Buxton	506
Camborne	528
Cannock	976
Cardiff	9,209
Chard	96
Chester	1,059
Coleraine	1,429
Colnbrook	717
Craigavon	331
Cullompton	11,636
Dalcross	92
Derby	672
Doncaster	2,179
Dover	352
Dronfield	1,116
Dundee	190
Eastleigh	813
Easton	709
Edinburgh	786
Exeter	3,355
Fleetwood	1,473
Gateshead	1,008
Glasgow	6,277
Grimsby	4,960
Guildford	16
Harlow	64
Heywood	1,456
Hull	1,924
Kings Lynn	190
Leeds	943
Leek	1,392
Lisburn	1,950
Liverpool	14,586
Londonderry	1,476
Maidstone	448
Manchester	3,255
Milton Keynes	320
Newcastle	298
Newport	10
Newtownabbey	1,097
Northallerton	1,116
Oswestry	2,109
Peterborough	944
Plymouth	1,336
Pontefract	188
Portadown	3,243
Preston	1,180
Rhyl	1,536
Rochdale	592
St. Albans	352
St. Helens	208
Salford	421
Sheffield	856
Sherborne	4,345
Stonehouse	304
Stourport-on-Severn	976
Strabane	3,106
Swansea	3,173
Swindon	389
Taunton	559
Tewkesbury	1,905
Thetford	152
Truro	3,351
Warrington	2,254
Warwick	1,104
Wigan	960
Wigston	1,405
Yeovil	204
Skimmed Milk Powder	
Aberdeen	620
Ammanford	3,480
Antrim	6,897
Ballymena	793
Bambridge	5,486
Barry	480
Bedwas	9,364
Belfast	45
Billingham	7,620
Blackburn	960
Bootle	2,600
Bristol	5,358
Burton-on-the-Water	480
Calne	120
Cheltenham	240
Cockermouth	1,240
Coleraine	1,212
Craigavon	856
Cranleigh	400
Cumbernauld	336
Cwmbran	280
Darlington	1,000
Dormanstown	936
Droitwich	3,058
Durham	1,095
Exeter	3,288
Glenrothes	966
Gorseinon	1,440
Grymych	20
Haresfield	478
Hereford	3,660
Hillsborough	370
Katesbridge	420
Kinnerley	1,720
Kirby	560
Leicester	283
Llandyssul	1,560
Lostwithiel	280
Moneymore	537
Morberth	440
Newbridges	360
Newcastle	360
Newton Abbott	2,630
Northallerton	920
Nuneaton	48
Ossett	200
Oswestry	2,409
Overton-on-Dee	40
Pendadd	2
Penrith	920
Plymouth	1,400
Portadown	10,081
Portsmouth	640

Location	Quantity (Tonnes)
Rathfriland	1,115
St. Clears	960
St. Helens	760
Sandbach	960
Stockton	3,394
Stonehouse	1,520
Strabane	9,379
Taunton	2,495
Telford	5,500
Tetbury	1,228
Torrington	1,480
Warrington	456
Wellington	1,840
Westbury	1,198
Whitchurch (Salop)	1,814
Whitchurch (Hants)	241
Widnes	3,940
Worcester	5,203
Beef	
Aberdeen	3,127
Avonmouth	459
Ballymena	911
Belfast	1,787
Bessbrook	99
Bishops Stortford	14
Bourne	151
Bury St. Edmunds	292
Cannock	486
Cardiff	669
Colnbrook	7
Craigavon	2,864
Cullompton	269
Doncaster	66
Droitwich	567
Dundee	503
Dungannon	2,539
Eastleigh	70
Easton	164
Edinburgh	548
Felixstowe	142
Fraserburgh	80
Gateshead	491
Glasgow	1,148
Grantham	164
Hull	7,041
Inverness	492
Kings Lynn	3,517
Leeds	1,611
Leith	13
Lisburn	266
Liverpool	2,294
Lowestoft	216
Manchester	677
March	18
Newtonabbey	2,894
Northallerton	45
Nuneaton	56
Oswestry	38
Paddock Wood	841
Peterborough	3,016
Peterhead	146
Plymouth	382
Pontefract	199
Portadown	14
Rhyl	88
St. Helens	205
Sherborne	166
Shrewsbury	987
Stirling	189
Warrington	128
Warwick	99
Breadwheat	
Ford	5,614
Gateshead	112
Hadleigh	4,246
Halesworth	5,418
Kings Lynn	6,822
Pebmarsh	6,445
Raydon	1,951
Skegness	1,820
Stretham	3,315
Swindon	24,828
Wells	359
Wingham	3,427
Wisbech	6,052

Milk

Mr. William Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which European Economic Community member states have produced over their milk quota to date or for such periods for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *37*]: Data on the part year quotas of other member states are not available. The following table shows, for each EC member state, the percentage cutback on 1983-84 deliveries required to keep within the 1984-85 annual quota and the percentage cutback to date compared with production in the corresponding period of 1983-84. The arrangements for allocating additional quota, including the granting of different base years to producers who have made special case applications may affect the proportion of the annual quota available in a particular part of the year so that the percentage cut required to be within quota during part of the year could be above or below the percentage cut required for the year as a whole. Most recent estimates indicate an increasing trend towards lower levels of production. The Agriculture Commissioner has said that over the last two months production levels were 5 to 7 per cent. below last year whereas over the period April to September 1984 they were 3 per cent. below last year.

	Per cent. Change required on 1983-84 change in deliveries to achieve quota	*Per cent. deliveries April to September 1984 on same period 1983*
Belgium	−4·01	†−2·88
Denmark	−6·60	−5·94
France	−2·52	−0·03
Germany	−7·79	−4·42
Greece	+10·05	†−0·26
Ireland	+1·71	+3·22
Italy	−2·56	*0·72
Luxembourg	+3·74	+4·57
Netherlands	−6·78	−4·56
United Kingdom	−6·16	‡−8·82

* April to July.
† April to August.
‡ April to October.
Source: Eurostat.CRONOS 30 November 1984.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Namibia

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the British Government have done so far to assess the developmental needs of Namibia, both pre and post-independence;

(2) whether the British Government have any plans to send in the near future a team of experts to Namibia to assess in detail the manpower and specialist requirements of the Namibian infrastructure, in preparation for independence.

Mr. Raison: While Namibia remains under the unlawful administration of the South African authorities we shall continue to confine our assistance to training awards for individual Namibians. Once implementation of Security Council resolution 435 is under way we should be willing to consider further assistance in consultation with the post-independence Government.

DEFENCE

Independent European Programme Group

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking in the wake of the recent meeting of the Independent European Programme Group; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The tasks of the procurement executive of the Ministry of Defence are assuming even greater importance than hitherto. I described in the "Statement on Defence Estimates 1984" (Cmnd. 9227) the efforts that are being made to secure greater value for money from my Department's equipment budget, which in 1984-85 amounts to some £8 billion. In particular, I attach great importance to increased use of competition in letting contracts for equipment projects. At the same time, the Government have concluded that as technology becomes more sophisticated and the real cost of equipment continues to rise, it will be more important then ever for the United Kingdom to collaborate with its allies to develop and produce equipment. A significant step in this direction was taken at the meeting of the Independent European Programme Group held on 22-23 November 1984 at The Hague, and I have already placed a copy of the declaration, published at the conclusion of that meeting, in the Library. I have now issued instructions to my Department setting out the action to be taken to give effect in the United Kingdom to the decisions reached in The Hague. I have also had a preliminary discussion on the next steps in the National Defence Industries Council, and I have invited the industry side of the council to have further talks with me in the new year.

These developments are placing growing demands on the procurement executive, and to respond to them I have decided to make certain changes in its top management structure. At present the chief of defence procurement, Mr. David Perry, has responsibility for international equipment collaboration as well as for the management of my Department's procurement programme generally. I have decided that in future he should devote himself full-time to the pursuit of collaboration. It will be his task to lead the sustained and determined drive that will be needed over a period of years in order to bring about the substantial increase in co-operation with our allies which the Government believe the circumstances of the future require. Mr. Perry will be known as the chief of defence equipment collaboration and he will continue to be a member of the Defence Council. He will report through the permanent under-secretary to me and other Defence Ministers.

Mr. Perry's remaining responsibilities will continue to be undertaken by the chief of defence procurement, and Mr. Peter Levene, who is at present chairman of United Scientific Holdings plc, has accepted my invitation to fill this post. His appointment will last for five years, and his salary will be £95,000 a year. I am discussing the precise terms of the appointment with the Civil Service Commission, but I can say now that Mr. Levene will not be appointed under the terms of the Civil Service Order-in-Council 1982. He will sever all connection with his present company, and at the end of his appointment he has agreed to be subject to the same rules governing the acceptance of outside appointments as apply to civil servants.

These changes involve the creation of an additional post at permanent secretary level, but this is necessary to meet the new situation facing the top management of the procurement executive. More generally, I am reducing the top structure of my Department as a whole: as explained in the White Paper on the "Central Organisation for Defence" (Cmnd. 9315), the number of posts at the levels of deputy secretary and under-secretary and their military equivalents is being reduced by four and five respectively.

The new appointments, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has approved, will come into effect in March 1985.

RAF Basic Trainer

67. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy with regard to the overseas sales prospects of any aircraft selected as a basic trainer for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Butler: As I have already made clear, overseas sales prospects will be one of the factors considered when selecting a basic trainer for the Royal Air Force.

Over-the-horizon Radar System

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United States' military plans to install an over-the-horizon radar system in England and Scotland.

Mr. Butler: I shall reply shortly.

Glory Hole, Portsmouth (Dumping)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions have taken place with members of his Department, either civil or military, concerning the dumping of material excavated from the tip known as the Glory Hole at Eastney, Portsmouth; and what was the outcome of these discussions;

(2) what materials were dumped at the tip known as the Glory Hole, Eastney, Portsmouth, during the years when the tip was used for his Department's surplus waste; and whether there are records to indicate whether the waste was toxic or dangerous.

Mr. Lee: The tip known as the Glory Hole at Eastney, Portsmouth, was sold by the Ministry of Defence to Portsmouth corporation in 1971. As the information requested relates to disposal action taken over 30 years ago I will write to the hon. Member.

Defence Budget

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned growth in real terms for the defence budget in 1986-87, including Falklands costs.

Mr. Stanley: The defence budget for 1986-87 will be announced in the 1985 Public Expenditure White Paper.

Libyans (Training)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has had any discussions with the AMAC Corporation regarding a proposal to provide training in Britain for 17 Libyans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: No such discussions have been held with the AMAC Corporation. Any requests for Libyan nationals to visit Britain would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Technical Ceramics

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for Defence what resources are being devoted by his Department to the research and development of technical ceramics.

Mr. Butler: Some 20 senior scientific personnel and supporting staff are working on various aspects of ceramics materials and technology at defence research and development establishments, which also spend some £1·1 million per annum extramurally in this field.

FH70 Ammunition

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the delivery of FH70 ammunition; and whether German sources have met the most recent delivery dates.

Mr. Butler: There are currently two orders on German contractors, one for cartridges and one for the HE shell. Cartridge deliveries began on time in October this year in accordance with the contract. The contract for the HE shell requires that deliveries shall begin in mid-1985.

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the yellow card instructions still apply to service men before using firearms in Northern Ireland, whether or not the service men are in uniform or civilian attire.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence in which recent cases in the past year members of the armed forces have engaged in gunfire with terrorists in Northern Ireland; and if, in each case, he will indicate *(a)* who fired first and *(b)* if the terrorists were initially challenged and offered an opportunity to surrender to the security forces

Mr. Lee: The armed forces have engaged in gunfire in 73 separate incidents in 1984. In 24 of these the armed forces fired first. A challenge is always issued unless it is not possible to do so because life is in danger.

Messrs. Danny Doherty and William Fleming

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether Mr. Danny Doherty and Mr. William Fleming had *(a)* been challenged to surrender or *(b)* had drawn their firearms at the time of their killing by the British security forces;

(2) what steps were taken by the British security forces to stop and arrest Mr. Danny Doherty and Mr. William Fleming immediately before their killing by the security forces.

Mr. Lee: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the details of this incident which is the subject of an RUC investigation.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 14 December, *Official Report*, column 618, by whom the sighting of the General Belgrano was relayed to Admiral Woodward.

Mr. Stanley: By Northwood.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence at what time Northwood first learnt of the visual contact which HMS Conqueror had established with the General Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: On the afternoon of 1 May 1982.

Messrs. Aish and Co.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what sums he has received from Messrs. Aish and Company in respect of overcharging on defence contracts.

Mr. Lee: Contractual arrangements between the Ministry of Defence and its suppliers are commercially confidential.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Seat Belts

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present assessment of the results in Northern Ireland of the introduction of compulsory seat belts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: In the 21 months of compulsory seat belt wearing to 31 October 1984, 47 (41·2 per cent.) fewer drivers and 38 (38·8 per cent.) fewer passengers were killed, and 196 (4·2 per cent.) fewer drivers and 177 (4 per cent.) fewer passengers were injured, than in the previous 21 months. This reduction in casualties is gratifying and underlines the benefits of seat belt wearing for drivers and passengers.

Surveys indicate a seat belt wearing rate of 90 per cent.

Housing Executive

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints of discrimination and maladministration by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive have been lodged with the ombudsman; how many of these complaints were made by *(a)* Protestants and *(b)* Roman Catholics; and in how many cases it was found that discrimination and maladministration had occurred.

Dr. Boyson: The available information is contained in the Commissioner for Complaints annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Rates

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the maximum and minimum weekly and annual sums paid in respect of rates for the following dwellings owned by the Housing Executive *(a)* one-bedroom bungalows, *(b)* two-bedroom bungalows, *(c)* two-bedroom houses, *(d)* three-bedroom houses, *(e)* four-bedroom houses and *(f)* rural cottages.

Mr. Chris Patten: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list, for the latest convenient date, the number of children in Northern Ireland for whom social security benefits are paid, and indicate the amount paid in respect of each child or age band and the total for the last financial year and the expected totals for 1984;

(2) how many persons, other than children, at the latest convenient date were in receipt of each social security benefit in Northern Ireland; and what were the sums paid in respect of each benefit in the last financial year and the expected outturn for the present year.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Estimates of the average numbers receiving the main benefits at any one time are, however, given in table 2.17.20 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans" of February 1984—Cmnd. 9143–II.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what information he has as to the number of salmon which were taken by anglers in each stretch of the river Bush in each year since 1973 to the latest available date by *(a)* fly, *(b)* prawn, *(c)* worm and *(d)* spinning;

(2) how many salmon and grilse were taken by the fish trap on the river Bush at Bushmills in each year since 1973 for stripping; how many salmon parr were produced from those fish in each year; where they were used for restocking; how many salmon nets were counted in the Bush system in each of those years; and what was the estimated production of parr from those redds;

(3) if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many salmon and grilse passed through the salmon trap on the river bank at Bushmills in each month in each year since 1973, the total for each year, the number of fish taken and sold by the Department of Agriculture in each year, the sums realised from any such sales annually and the average size of the salmon and grilse ascending the river in each year.

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the age of salmon fry at their migration from Northern Ireland rivers; and how this compares with other river systems in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Irish Republic, *(c)* Norway, *(d)* France, *(e)* Canada and *(f)* the United States of America.

Dr. Boyson: Information on the age of salmon fry at their migration is available in Northern Ireland only in respect of the river Bush, where it is one to two years. While there may be some published information in respect of the other countries listed, this could be extracted in a form suitable for meaningful comparison only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reports he has received, and what research he has carried out, into the effects of the County Donegal offshore salmon fishery on salmon stocks in *(a)* the Foyle system, *(b)* the Bann system and *(c)* the other salmon rivers in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: A programme of work using micro-tagging techniques commenced in 1983 on the river Bush. This will be a long-term study which may throw light on the effects of the Co. Donegal offshore salmon fishing. While there were some returns of tagged fish in 1984 an analysis of these returns is not yet available. No recent comparable research has been undertaken on stocks from the Foyle and Bann systems.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the catchment area of each salmon river in Northern Ireland in square miles, *(b)* the minimum flow expected and *(c)* the mean flow expected in cusecs and the maximum flow under flood conditions.

Dr. Boyson: The following information relates to those salmon rivers for which flow data are available:

Catchment	*Total Area sq miles*	*Area to Guage sq miles*	*Minimum Daily Flow cusecs*	*Average Daily Flow cusecs*	*Maximum Flow cusecs*
Main	274				
to Dromona		88	23·0	187·0	2,594
Kellswater		49	8·0	93·0	4,539
Braid		68	3·0	113·0	3,569
Sixmilewater	116				
to Antrim		107	30·0	117·0	5,376
Blackwater	568				
to Maydown Bridge		367	12·0	490·0	3,759
Ballinderry	166				
to Ballinderry Bridge		162	31·0	257·0	6,523

Catchment	Total Area sq miles	Area to Guage sq miles	Minimum Daily Flow cusecs	Average Daily Flow cusecs	Maximum Flow cusecs
Moyola	130				
to New Bridge		118	29·0	222·0	3,946
Upper Bann	162				
to Dynes Bridge		129	3·6	162·0	6,954
Clanrye	—				
to Mountmill Bridge		51	0·6	69	1,095
Lower Bann	2,235				
to Movanagher		2,011	424·0	3,514	14,049
Mourne	712				
to Camowen		106	9·5	225·0	4,073
Drumragh		125	15·5	245·0	4,950
Fairywater		62	6·0	120·0	4,045
Derg		130	35·0	490·0	7,448
Faughan	115				
to Drumahoe		105	27·0	248·0	6,482
Roe	151				
to Ardnergie		141	32·0	337·0	—
Bush	129				
to Seneirl Bridge		118	20·5	176·0	3,272

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any angling clubs in *(a)* the Foyle Fisheries Commission area and *(b)* the Fisheries Conservation Board area make available to those two bodies details of any records regarding catches by anglers in respect of (i) salmon and grilse and (ii) sea trout; and how the success rate revealed by any such records compares with the angling catch reported directly by licence holders to the licence issuing authorities.

Dr. Boyson: No.

Civil Service (Information System)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish the details of the information system on the composition of the Northern Ireland Civil Service which he announced on 4 December, *Official Report*, column 97.

Dr. Boyson: Questionnaires will be issued to non-industrial staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service in January 1985 to establish whether individuals have been Protestant educated or Roman Catholic educated; this is the only significant piece of data required for equal opportunities monitoring which is not already held in respect of members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is expected that the first report based on the equal opportunities information system will be published about mid-1986.

Fishery Station, Bushmills

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate whether and when he intends to publish a comprehensive report of the work carried out to date by the Department of Agriculture fishery station at Bushmills.

Dr. Boyson: No. Details are, however, published in the annual report on research and technical work of the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. Fourteen scientific papers relating to various aspects of the work have also been published in scientific journals.

Rivers (Acidity)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on increasing acidity of rivers in Northern Ireland; and what rivers have been the worst affected.

Mr. Chris Patten: Regular water quality monitoring undertaken by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has shown no evidence of increasing acidity.

Roads

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums have been expended in each year since 1978 in each road division in Northern Ireland on *(a)* capital works and *(b)* maintenance.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:

Financial year	Roads Service Division					
	Ballymena £ million	Belfast £ million	Coleraine £ million	Craigavon £ million	Downpatrick £ million	Omagh £ million
(a) Capital works:						
1978-79	3·3	5·3	7·6	4·4	5·6	5·4
1979-80	3·9	11·4	7·3	5·6	6·1	6·1
1980-81	4·6	15·5	5·9	4·1	6·9	4·8

Financial year	Roads Service Division					
	Ballymena £ million	Belfast £ million	Coleraine £ million	Craigavon £ million	Downpatrick £ million	Omagh £ million
1981-82	3·6	11·2	10·7	3·2	4·4	3·0
1982-83	2·9	11·0	11·0	1·9	2·2	1·9
1983-84	2·7	8·1	7·7	3·4	3·5	1·8
(b) Maintenance:						
1978-79	4·8	7·1	5·7	5·9	4·5	7·9
1979-80	5·2	8·6	4·3	6·5	5·5	7·6
1980-81	6·4	8·5	6·6	7·3	6·3	7·1
1981-82	6·6	10·5	6·9	7·2	7·2	8·2
1982-83	6·4	9·0	5·6	8·1	7·5	7·6
1983-84	7·5	11·9	7·0	9·3	9·1	8·2

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

(1) what proportion of urban roads in the Province are lit; and by what form of electric lighting;

(2) what proportion of group A roads in Northern Ireland are lit; and by what form of electric lighting.

Mr. Chris Patten: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

River Bush (Angling Permits)

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums are collected in licence fees in respect of each of *(a)* the new stretch, *(b)* the special stretch and *(c)* leap or restricted stretch of the river Bush fishery in each year since 1973 until the latest available date.

Dr. Boyson: Since licence fees are not levied on the basis of individual fisheries, it is assumed that the information required relates to the revenue from the daily angling permits issued by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. This information is published annually in the report on the Sea and Inland Fisheries of Northern Ireland. The figures for the 1984 angling season, which have not yet been published, are as follows:

	£
New Stretch*	1,781·00
Town or special Stretch	3,177·15
Leap or restricted Stretch	1,155·95

* An additional stretch of the river acquired by the Department for angling in 1984.

Births (Registration)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining the policy regarding the use of Irish names by parents registering the birth of children in the Registrar General's offices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Chris Patten: There is no separate policy on the use of Irish names. In all cases the final decision about the names and spelling of names must be made by the informant and that spelling must be inserted on the registration form.

Irish Language

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has given consideration to the position of the Irish language in Northern Ireland; and if he will consider whether, in respect of the numbers using, learning or acquainted with that language, legislation similar to the Welsh Language Act 1967 should be brought forward.

Mr. Hurd: The Government wish to provide adequate support to those who seek to use Irish and preserve their cultural heritage — and already do so through the education system—but are not persuaded that the legal status suggested would be an appropriate reflection of the position of Irish in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to applying in Northern Ireland the principles set out in the resolutions and reports adopted by the European Parliament on the rights of people respecting minority languages and cultures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurst: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Legislation (Repeal)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give consideration to bringing forward legislation to repeal section 234 of the Settlement of Ireland Act 1665, section 19 of the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1949 and sections 1, 2 and 5 of the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737.

Mr. Hurd: The Government have no plans to change the legislation in the question, but we are giving consideration to the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mentally Handicapped Persons

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will improve the provision of resources for adult training centres and social education centres for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *63*]: There are at present 2,129 training centre places available for mentally handicapped adults in Northern Ireland. There are a further 271 places in planning or under construction. The provision of adult training centres is a priority within the mental handicap programme and the Department's regional strategic plan. Additional places will be provided as resources permit.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of sheltered employment for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *63*]: I understand that 79 mentally handicapped people are currently employed in three village communities run by the Glencraig trust. The communities are substantially grant-aided by the Government and are expected to expand their work force to 100 in 1985. In Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd., 23 out of 135 severely disabled workers are mentally handicapped. Of these, 14 have been placed in sheltered industrial groups within host companies throughout Northern Ireland, where they work alongside the able-bodied and receive the same wages and conditions of service.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Government's attitude to and role in the dispute in the Western Board area arising from the sole deployment of young help workers as day centre bus assistants and the ICTU directive; and if he will suggest to the board that it employs full staff members to assist those using the buses or redeploy care assistants on short hours to do this work with the support of young help workers.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *63*]: The Government regret this dispute, which is having the effect of depriving young people of an opportunity to do useful work and depriving the elderly and the handicapped of valuable assistance. The deployment of permanent staff and young help volunteers by the Western Health and Social Services Board is a matter for the board.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining the nature and extent of current provision for the mentally handicapped in Northern Ireland, what the Government's aims and objectives are in making such provision and whether he is satisfied that this provision will meet those objectives.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *63*]: The Department of Health and Social Services and health and social services boards seek to meet the needs of mentally handicapped people in Northern Ireland through the provision of adult training centres, schools for mentally handicapped children, residential homes together with appropriate medical, nursing, paramedical and social work services. Hospital services are provided for those mentally handicapped people who require specialist medical and nursing care.

Details of the policy in respect of mentally handicapped people in Northern Ireland together with further information on actual and planned service provision and the type of development envisaged for the future are contained in the minutes of evidence of the Social Services Select Committee on community care.

Gas Supplies

Mr. Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what costs have been incurred to date as a result of the plans, now discarded by Her Majesty's Government, to bring gas to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland.

Dr. Boyson [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *611*]: Up to the end of November, expenditure totalling £5,969,000 has been incurred.

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the security forces in the current year, and for each of the last five years, have been *(a)* charged with criminal offences or *(b)* disciplined as a result of incidents in Northern Ireland involving injuries to persons caused by the use of plastic bullets.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 December 1984, c. 349]: Between 1 January 1979 and 30 November 1984 no member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary was charged with a criminal offence or disciplined as a result of an incident involving injuries caused by a plastic baton round.

I understand that the Army does not maintain information in the form requested and that it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lear Fan Ltd.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether his officials have had any recent discussions with Lear Fan Ltd. about future funding; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: Discussions have been taking place with the private sector investors who entered into a financial commitment to Lear Fan Ltd. in 1982 about the future funding of the project.

Agreement in principle has been reached that Zoysia Corporation, the private sector consortium, will make a substantial additional sum of money available to the company. This is a welcome sign of the investors' confidence in the project and of their confidence in Northern Ireland.

A project which started out being heavily dependent on public funds, has moved through the 1982 agreement, when the new funding was on the basis of £2 from the private sector for every £1 put up by the Government, to a stage when all the new funding now proposed is to come from the private sector. The Government's remaining commitment under the legally binding 1982 agreement consists of $9·14 million of further funding and a loan guarantee of $15 million. The overall size of the project has been reduced significantly and the planned number of jobs in Northern Ireland has been adjusted in consequence from the 1982 prospective figure of some 2,800 to a new and more realistic figure of 1,100. The company's finances are being restructured to reflect the smaller size of the project now planned and to enable the private sector to make its further investment. Central to the agreement is the prospect of the Government's overall financial exposure to the project being reduced and the confirmation of Northern Ireland as the base for the principal manufacturing facility.

It is my hope that the agreement in principle will be implemented quickly so that the work in the Northern Ireland factories can be restarted as soon as possible.

Airports (Privatisation)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has come to any decision regarding the privatisation of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have at present no proposal to privatise Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Flags and Emblems Act 1954

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been found guilty of an offence under the Flags and Emblems Act 1954 in Northern Ireland in each of the last 15 years; and how many have been *(a)* given a prison sentence and *(b)* fined.

Mr. Scott: None.

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been charged with offences under the Flags and Emblems Act 1954 in each of the last 15 years in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Information in the form required is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement listing all prisoners in Northern Ireland currently remanded in custody detailing where they are held, how long they have been on remand, what charges they face, whether they have served any previous periods on remand and the charges that face them, whether they have served any previous periods in prison and the number of court appearances they have made in respect of the charges on which they are remanded.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Trials

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the delays in bringing cases to trial in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give consideration to the introduction of a legal time limit on bringing cases to trial in Northern Ireland similar to that in Scotland and currently proposed for England and Wales.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 6 December 1984, at column 229.

Detained Persons

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the time served in custody on remand by people charged with offences under emergency legislation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy for strip-searching prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Armagh.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Messrs Danny Doherty and William Fleming

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether warrants for the arrest of Mr. Danny Doherty and Mr. William Fleming had been issued at the time of their being killed by the British security forces.

Mr. Hurd: No.

Housing

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many houses were built or completed in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector in Northern Ireland in each year since 1954; and what is the estimate for 1985.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. 59]: The available information is contained in the housing returns for Northern Ireland for the periods from December 1954 to end December 1968, the "Digest of Housing Statistics for Northern Ireland" for the period end December 1968 to end September 1973 and the Northern Ireland housing statistics publications for the period end September 1973 to end December 1983; statistics for 1984 will be published in mid-1985. The public expenditure allocations for housing in 1985-86, which I announced on 13 December 1984, assume that 2,250 new dwellings will be started by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and almost 1,000 by registered housing associations. No precise estimates have been made of new house building starts or completions in the private sector in 1985, although I look forward to the continuation of the current levels of activity.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Dental Services

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what response he sent to the British Dental Association in answer to its letter of last June calling for an immediate tightening up of the system for monitoring dental work done and claims submitted to the Dental Estimates Board; and whether action has been taken since June to put into effect its proposals;

(2) what response was sent to the British Dental Association in answer to its letter of July 1982 proposing a 50 per cent. expansion in the number of regional dental officers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have explained to the British Dental Association that the staffing of the dental reference service has to be considered in the context of the Government's policy to reduce Civil Service manpower. We are satisfied that the present numbers of dental officers, taken in conjunction with other methods of monitoring, are sufficient to provide reasonable checks on the quality of dental treatment.

The most important single step which can be taken to improve the monitoring carried out by the Dental Estimates Board is the purchase of a new computer. We expect to make an announcement on this shortly.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) to what factors he attributes the increase in the number of homeless supplementary benefit claimants staying in bed and breakfast accommodation;

(2) if he will give the increase in each of the last five years in the number of homeless supplementary benefit claimants staying in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that separate records are not maintained on whether supplementary benefit claimants entered ordinary board and lodging accommodation because of homelessness or other factors. I would refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 14 December to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) at column *661-2* for information on the number of supplementary benefit claimants living in ordinary board and lodging accommodation since 1979. There is no simple explanation for the increased number in recent years of ordinary board and lodging cases which reflects more than the increase in the overall number of supplementary benefit recipients. Recent evidence indicates that an important factor has been that some landlords and some claimants, particularly the younger age groups, have found board and lodging payments financially attractive.

Sir Brandon Rhys-Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what proportion of people retiring with the benefit of annuities from occupational pension schemes currently qualify for supplementary benefit immediately upon retirement;

(2) what proportion of people over 70 years of age and in receipt of annuities from occupational pension schemes currently qualify for supplementary benefit; and what is the corresponding proportion of people over 80 years of age;

(3) how many pensioners currently receiving annuities from occupational pension schemes are also in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that at December 1982 some 282,000 supplementary pensioners were also in receipt of an occupational pension. I regret that information is not readily available of the numbers of recipients in the respective age groups or of those who qualify for supplementary pension immediately on retirement.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the most recent figures for the distribution of health expenditure for each English region, expressed in per capita terms and categorised according to *(a)* hospital services expenditure, *(b)* community health and family practitioners' services expenditure and *(c)* total expenditure.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The figures for 1983-84 are as follows:

Region	*Hospital Service Expenditure* £	*Community Health and Family Practitioner services* £	*Other services expenditure* £	*Total expenditure by Health Authorities* £
Northern	155·25	76·63	21·18	253·06
Yorkshire	150·86	75·16	19·78	245·80
Trent	143·81	71·46	17·14	232·41
East Anglian	140·69	75·85	18·74	235·28
North West Thames	168·89	79·18	20·76	268·83
North East Thames	200·91	76·26	21·95	299·12
South East Thames	178·20	78·90	23·34	280·44
South West Thames	170·31	80·33	22·92	273·56
Wessex	144·07	76·63	19·42	240·12
Oxford	125·40	72·78	20·23	218·41
South Western	145·75	76·31	19·99	242·05
West Midlands	144·96	74·12	17·50	236·58
Mersey	164·32	76·35	20·63	261·30
North Western	165·66	81·85	22·71	270·22
All Regions	157·88	76·47	20·33	254·68

Notes:

1. The expenditure figures used are taken from the annual accounts submitted to the Department by regional and district health authorities.
2. Other services expenditure includes the cost of the ambulance, blood transfusion, mass radiography and various other services and headquarters administration.
3. The figures do not include the cost of certain services provided centrally (for example, by the Dental Estimates Board and the Prescription Pricing Authority); nor expenditure incurred by the London Postgraduate special health authorities and preserved boards of governors.
4. The figures will reflect regional influences, the major one being the effect of London weighting allowance in the four Thames regions.
5. Family practitioner committee expenditure has been included in the region of the health authority which accounts for that expenditure. However, a few family practitioner committees' catchment areas straddle regional boundaries and will have marginally distorted some of the figures.
6. The population figures used are the mid-year estimates of resident population for 1983, the latest available.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to inform people who are now receiving medicines which will not be prescribable as National Health Service items after 1 April 1985 of the sums they will have to pay if they wish to continue with such medicines.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We propose to produce a list of drugs prescribable on the NHS which will meet all clinical needs so there will be no medical reason for any patient to require another medicine. The retail prices of medicines are a matter for the drugs industry and pharmacists and other suppliers.

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the representations he has had from organisations and individuals in the medical profession claiming lack of consultation with them prior to his making available his intention to bring forward limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: 362 of the 671 representations received to date from medical bodies and individual doctors are copies of a circular letter prepared by Roche Products Ltd. which raises the question of prior consultation.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations he had with the Royal College of General Practitioners before imposing the limited list of drugs available for prescription on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We did not consult the Royal College of General Practitioners before reaching a decision, based on our detailed investigations of the experience of other countries, on the principle of the limited list. We have however invited the college to discuss with us the contents of the proposed list.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he took *(a)* from within the United Kingdom, and *(b)* from outside the United Kingdom in formulating his proposals for a limited list of drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 11 December at columns *464-65*.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how he intends to prevent the saving of the order of £100 million which he expects to make as a result of his proposals to limit the range of drugs prescribable under the National Health Service being eroded by price increases elsewhere consistent with the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 4 December, at c. *168*. Any application for price increases will be looked at very critically.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria will determine whether or not a drug is included in the list of drugs it is proposed to leave prescribable under the National Health Service in each of the therapeutic groups affected by his announcement of 8 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The drugs to remain available on the National Health Service in the categories affected by our limited list proposals will not be finalised until full consultation has taken place. Our stated intention is to provide an adequate range of cheap and effective generic drugs in each of the categories covered.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that his proposals to limit the range of drugs prescribable under the National Health Service comply with the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice on this matter.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will ensure that the way our proposals are implemented accords with European Community legislation.

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence his Department gave to the Greenfield committee on limited drugs lists.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A paper prepared by officials of our Department and put to the Greenfield committee in 1981 rejected the idea of a limited list of drugs across all therapeutic groups. It did not consider the present proposals which affect only the less essential therapeutic categories.

Sickness Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for *(a)* the total number of sickness benefit recipients, *(b)* of these the number receiving supplementary benefit, *(c)* a breakdown of recipients by their previous employment status, *(d)* the number of recipients claiming for an adult dependant and *(e)* the number of recipients claiming for a child dependant.

Mr. Whitney: The following is the information:

(a) The total number of sickness benefit beneficiaries as at 2 April 1983, the latest date for which information is available, was 338,000.

(b) The total number of sickness benefit beneficiaries also in receipt of supplementary benefit as at 8 December 1982, the latest date for which information is available, was 25,000.

(c) A breakdown of sickness benefit beneficiaries by their former employment status as at 2 April 1983 was—

	Number
Employed persons	290,000
Self-employed persons	17,000
Others	31,000

(d) The number of sickness benefit beneficiaries claiming an increase for an adult dependant as at 2 April 1983 was 83,000.

(e) The number of sickness benefit beneficiaries claiming an increase for a child dependant as at 2 April 1983 was 71,000 but this total includes 38,000 beneficiaries who also claimed for an adult dependant and are included in the figure shown at *(d)* above.

Sick Pay

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for *(a)* the total number of statutory sick pay recipients, *(b)* of these the number also receiving supplementary benefit, *(c)* a breakdown of statutory sick pay recipients according to (i) whether they are single or married and (ii) which of the rates of statutory sick pay they are receiving, *(d)* the proportion of recipients qualifying for sickness benefit at the end of their eight weeks on statutory sick pay, and *(e)* the proportion of people falling sick who receive (i) statutory sick pay, (ii) sickness benefit and (iii) supplementary benefit for the first eight weeks of sickness.

Mr. Whitney: I regret the information is not yet available. Information on *(a)* will not be available until about the end of 1985. Items *(b)* and *(e)* cannot be fully

answered until *(a)* is available. Information on *(d)* should be available about mid-1985. Information on *(c)* is not being collected.

Benefit Applicants

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of individuals in the last year in *(a)* Merseyside and *(b)* Knowsley who have had applications for benefit turned down and the number of renewals of benefit refused at medical appeal tribunals; and what was the percentage in each case of total applicants.

Mr. Newton: I regret the information is not available in the form requested. The table gives details of the number of decisions made under the industrial injuries scheme by the medical appeal tribunal for the Merseyside region in 1983.

Cases come before the tribunal on appeal by the claimant or reference on behalf of the Secretary of State. The tribunal decides cases where no assessment of disablement has been made and cases where the amount of the assessment is being challenged. A Tribunal's decision which is unfavourable to the claimant does not necessarily mean that entitlement is extinguished.

	Number	*Percentage of total number*
Number of appeals and references decided	879	—
Decision		
Favourable to claimant	468	53
Unfavourable to claimant	53	6
Not changed	358	41

I regret that similar information is not available for mobility allowance cases which can also be referred to medical appeal tribunals.

Blind and Partially Sighted Persons

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are registered blind or partially sighted at present in *(a)* Greater Manchester, *(b)* the city of Manchester, *(c)* the borough of Trafford and *(d)* the Stretford constituency.

Mr. Tony Newton: Information is not available centrally for all the areas mentioned. The latest available information, which relates to the position at 31 March 1982, is as follows:

Numbers of registered blind and partially sighted persons

	Blind	*Partially sighted*	*Combined Totals*
Metropolitan County of Greater Manchester	6,861	4,121	10,982
Metropolitan District of Manchester	1,554	1,238	2,792
Metropolitan District of Trafford	567	323	890

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the amount spent on the National Health Service per head of the population for the whole of the United Kingdom and per head of the working population for 1983-84.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Net spending on the National Health Service for the whole of the United Kingdom for 1983-84 excluding charges to patients, was about £285 per head of population; when spread over the working population, including the unemployed, this net spending amounted to some £605 per head.

Supplementary Benefit (Postal Procedures)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library a copy of "Monitoring the Pilot Exercise to Test the Extension of Supplementary Benefit Postal Procedures".

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) to my hon. Friend, the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 4 June at column 27.

Hip Replacement Operation

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service patients have received hip replacements each year since 1979; what was the average cost of each operation performed; and how many National Health Service patients are currently awaiting hip replacements.

Mr. John Patten: Waiting list information is available centrally by the specialty of treatment and not by operation. The available information on operations performed is given in the table.

Estimated number of operations for total hip replacement and other arthroplasty of hip in NHS hospitals in England

Year	*Estimated number*
1979	30,730
1980	33,420
1981	34,780
1982*	33,730

* In-patient activity was generally depressed by industrial action in the NHS during 1982.

The average cost of a hip replacement operation is estimated as some £2,700.

Measles Immunisation

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what level of funding he plans to allocate to district health authorities to enable them to raise the level of provision of measles immunisation to all susceptible children entering pre-school playgroups, nursery schools and primary schools.

Mr. John Patten: When we launched our initiative to increase take-up of measles immunisation in July, health authorities were advised that any additional expenditure resulting from it should be met from within their existing revenue allocations.

Hospital Building

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of newly built National Health Service hospitals in the last 10 years were designed by *(a)* regional architects and *(b)* private firms.

Mr. John Patten: Information in this form is not held centrally by the Department. Records are available for

about 350 projects each costing over £1 million designed during this period which indicate that 32 per cent. were designed by regional architects and 68 per cent. by private firms.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many old hospital buildings are scheduled to be remodelled during the next three years; and what level of funding will be allocated for this purpose.

Mr. John Patten: The decision to undertake the remodelling of an existing health building is taken by individual health authorities against a background of locally determined policies and priority. Since the projects usually fall below the financial limit which would require prior agreement with the Department, no record of either the numbers of buildings involved or related funding is held centrally.

Hospitals (Energy Consumption)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines his Department has issued to hospitals about reducing energy consumption; and to what extent energy use in hospitals has decreased resulting from such guidelines.

Mr. John Patten: The Department has issued guidelines and produced performance indicators that will enable hospitals to monitor their energy consumption and establish targets for reducing it. It has also published articles regularly in NHS and other journals on energy saving methods applicable to the NHS.

The NHS in England and Wales is currently realising savings estimated at £68 million a year but it is not possible to determine the proportion directly attributable to the Department's guidance.

"Underused and Surplus Property in the National Health Service"

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what reaction he has had from health authorities arising from the report published by his Department entitled "Underused and Surplus Property in the National Health Service"; and if any of them have taken steps to implement recommendations issued in it.

Mr. John Patten: In general health authorities have reacted favourably to the recommendations of the report. All authorities are required to implement the report's principal recommendations and generally good progress is being made towards this.

Income Tax (Single Person's Allowance)

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of raising the national insurance contribution's lower earnings limit to the level of the single person's personal allowance for income tax.

Mr. Whitney: The cost of raising the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions to £38·40 (the weekly equivalent of the single person's personal tax allowance) would be £20 million in 1984-85. This figure assumes the upper earnings limit would be unchanged.

Heating Allowance

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many unemployed people in receipt of supplementary benefit receive the heating allowance; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the total unemployed supplementary benefit population.

Mr. Whitney: Provisional estimates suggest that in December 1983 about 600,000 unemployed people were receiving supplementary benefit heating additions; this represents about 33 per cent. of the number of unemployed people we estimate were receiving supplementary benefit in December 1983.

Furniture Grants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people on, or entitled to, supplementary benefit have been refused furniture grants in each year since 1980 at the benefit offices in Stockport and Tameside.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that this information is not available.

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a table showing the combined value of child tax allowance after clawback and family allowances on child benefit for each year from 1954 to 1984 expressed at November 1983 prices and at 1984 prices for the first, second, third and each subsequent child aged under 11 years, 11 to 16 years and over 16 years in standard rate tax-paying families.

Mr. Whitney: Table 1 gives the value of child support over the years in question, to standard rate taxpayers, at November 1983 prices and table 2 shows the comparable figures at November 1984 prices. Figures for children aged 11 to 15 and 16 and over have been given: those for children aged 11 to 16 and over 16 are not readily available.

Table 1

Value of child support for each child in standard rate tax-paying families expressed at November 1983† prices*

Date‡	*Children under age 11*			*Children aged 11-15*			*Children aged 16 and over*		
	First child	*Second child*	*Third*	*First child*	*Second child*	*Third*	*First child*	*Second child*	*Third*
April 1954	6·17	8·25	8·25	6·17	8·25	8·25	6·17	8·25	8·25
April 1955	6·60	8·78	8·78	6·60	8·78	8·78	6·60	8·78	8·78
April 1956	6·15	8·10	8·10	6·15	8·10	8·10	6·15	8·10	8·10
April 1957	6·05	7·96	8·55	7·52	9·51	9·95	9·07	10·99	11·50
April 1958	5·77	7·59	8·16	7·17	9·07	9·49	8·65	10·48	10·97
April 1959	5·28	7·18	7·67	6·54	8·51	9·01	7·88	9·78	10·34

Date‡	Children under age 11			Children aged 11-15			Children aged 16 and over		
	First child	Second child	Third‖	First child	Second child	Third‖	First child	Second child	Third‖
April 1960	5·24	7·13	7·68	6·50	8·45	8·94	7·82	9·71	10·27
April 1961	5·10	6·94	7·48	6·33	8·23	8·71	7·62	9·45	10·00
April 1962	4·83	6·56	7·08	5·98	7·79	8·24	7·21	8·94	9·46
April 1963	5·42	7·13	7·63	6·56	8·39	8·77	7·76	9·52	9·96
April 1964	5·32	6·98	7·48	6·43	8·22	8·59	7·60	9·33	9·77
April 1965	5·33	6·97	7·32	6·50	8·08	8·49	7·67	9·25	9·66
April 1966	5·14	6·73	7·07	6·27	7·80	8·20	7·41	8·93	9·33
April 1967	4·99	6·53	6·86	6·09	7·57	7·96	7·19	8·67	9·06
April 1968	4·78	5·99	6·36	5·83	7·04	7·36	6·88	8·04	8·41
April 1969	4·53	5·92	6·27	5·53	6·92	7·27	6·52	7·92	8·22
April 1970	4·29	5·61	5·94	5·23	6·55	6·88	6·18	7·50	7·78
April 1971	5·00	6·33	6·64	5·77	7·15	7·45	6·59	7·93	8·23
April 1972	4·70	5·96	6·24	5·43	6·73	7·01	6·20	7·46	7·74
April 1973	4·27	5·34	5·60	5·05	6·09	6·35	5·68	6·72	6·98
April 1974	4·90	5·80	6·03	5·64	6·48	6·73	6·25	7·09	7·35
April 1975	4·29	5·93	5·93	4·90	6·54	6·54	5·43	7·10	7·10
April 1976	4·50	5·90	5·90	5·01	6·41	6·41	5·48	6·86	6·86
April 1977	4·32	4·95	4·95	4·76	5·39	5·39	5·14	5·75	5·75
April 1978	5·15	5·15	5·15	5·55	5·55	5·55	5·89	5·89	5·89
April 1979‡	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38	6·38
November 1980	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92	5·92
November 1981	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85	5·85
November 1982	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13
November 1983	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50	6·50
November 1984	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53	6·53

* The combined value of child tax allowances after clawback and family allowance/child benefit.
† Based on the movement in the General Index of Retail Prices at November 1983.
‡ Child tax allowance ceased after the 1978-79 tax year and uprating dates are shown from 1979 onwards.
‖ And subsequent children.

Table 2

Value of child support for each child in standard rate tax-paying families expressed at November 1984† prices*

Date‡	Children under age 11			Children aged 11-15			Children aged 16 and over		
	First child	Second child	Third‖	First child	Second child	Third‖	First child	Second child	Third‖
April 1954	6·47	8·66	8·66	6·47	8·66	8·66	6·47	8·66	8·66
April 1955	6·93	9·21	9·21	6·93	9·21	9·21	6·93	9·21	9·21
April 1956	6·46	8·50	8·50	6·46	8·50	8·50	6·46	8·50	8·50
April 1957	6·34	8·36	8·98	7·89	9·98	10·45	9·52	11·53	12·07
April 1958	6·05	7·97	8·56	7·53	9·52	9·96	9·08	10·99	11·51
April 1959	5·54	7·53	8·05	6·87	8·93	9·45	8·27	10·26	10·85
April 1960	5·50	7·48	8·06	6·82	8·87	9·38	8·21	10·19	10·78
April 1961	5·35	7·28	7·85	6·64	8·64	9·14	7·99	9·92	10·49
April 1962	5·06	6·89	7·43	6·28	8·17	8·64	7·56	9·39	9·93
April 1963	5·69	7·48	8·01	6·88	8·80	9·20	8·14	9·99	10·46
April 1964	5·58	7·33	7·85	6·75	8·63	9·02	7·98	9·79	10·25
April 1965	5·59	7·31	7·68	6·82	8·48	8·91	8·05	9·71	10·14
April 1966	5·40	7·06	7·42	6·59	8·19	8·60	7·77	9·37	9·79
April 1967	5·24	6·85	7·20	6·39	7·95	8·35	7·54	9·10	9·50
April 1968	5·02	6·29	6·67	6·12	7·39	7·72	7·22	8·44	8·82
April 1969	4·75	6·22	6·58	5·80	7·26	7·63	6·84	8·31	8·62
April 1970	4·50	5·89	6·23	5·49	6·88	7·22	6·48	7·87	8·16
April 1971	5·25	6·65	6·96	6·06	7·51	7·82	6·92	8·32	8·64
April 1972	4·93	6·25	6·55	5·70	7·06	7·36	6·51	7·83	8·12
April 1973	4·48	5·61	5·88	5·30	6·39	6·66	5·96	7·05	7·32
April 1974	5·14	6·09	6·32	5·92	6·80	7·07	6·56	7·44	7·71
April 1975	4·50	6·23	6·23	5·14	6·86	6·86	5·70	7·45	7·45
April 1976	4·72	6·19	6·19	5·26	6·73	6·73	5·75	7·20	7·20
April 1977	4·54	5·19	5·19	4·99	5·65	5·65	5·39	6·03	6·03
April 1978	5·40	5·40	5·40	5·83	5·83	5·83	6·18	6·19	6·18
April 1979‡	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70	6·70
November 1980	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22	6·22
November 1981	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14	6·14
November 1982	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44	6·44
November 1983	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82	6·82
November 1984	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85	6·85

* The combined value of child tax allowances after clawback and family allowance/child benefit.
† Based on the movement in the General Index of Retail Prices at November 1984.
‡ Child tax allowance ceased after the 1978-79 tax year and uprating dates are shown from 1979 onwards.
‖ And subsequent children.

Nursing Homes (Lambeth)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to establish nursing homes for the elderly under the National Health Service in or about Lambeth.

Mr. John Patten: Health authorities in South-East Thames region are drawing up their strategic plans for health service developments over the next 10 years. I suggest the hon. Member seek this information from the chairmen of West Lambeth and Camberwell health authorities.

Aspirin and Paracetamol

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the known side effects of aspirin and paracetamol.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

EC (Drugs Costs)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the cost per person per day of drugs prescribed in each of the European Community member states.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I regret that we do not know of any source for this information.

Harrow Health Centre

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has recently visited, or intends to visit, the Harrow health centre.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I visited both the centre and a National Health Service practice in Harrow on 4 December.

Heating Additions

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will amend the regulations governing the operation of estate rate heating additions so as to provide that in the case of submissions which are approved, benefit is payable for the date of submission rather than the date of approval.

Mr. Whitney: The basis of our policy is set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 19 November at column *70* and we have no plans at present to amend the regulations.

Invalidity Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many invalidity pensioners receive the additional earnings-related component; how much the average addition is; and what steps his Department takes to ensure claimants know of this addition.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is planning to ensure that local authorities are consistent with each other in applying disregards to rent and rebate schemes for war disablement and war pensions.

Mr. Whitney: The Housing Benefits Regulations 1982, provide for the first £4 of a war widow's or war disablement pension to be disregarded when assessing entitlement to housing benefits. Under regulation 4 local authorities have the power to make a local scheme modifying the statutory provisions. Some authorities use that power to give a higher disregard for war widows' and war disablement pensions. We have no plans to change these or any other provisions of the housing benefit scheme which have not already been announced until we have considered the report of the independent review of the scheme.

Mr. Michael Martin

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has yet decided whether to hold an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death earlier this year of a patient, Mr. Michael Martin, in Broadmoor hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. I have asked Miss S. A. Ritchie, QC, to inquire into this matter and to report to me. The terms of reference of the inquiry will be:

"To inquire into the circumstances surrounding the incident on 6 July 1984 involving Mr. Michael Martin, a patient at Broadmoor Hospital, following which he was found dead; to consider the care and treatment accorded to Mr. Martin before and during his seclusion on 6 July; to report conclusions relating to this matter; and, in the light of those conclusions, to recommend any action that should be taken in relation to patient care".

Advice on clinical questions will be provided by an independent doctor and nurse. We are seeking the views of professional bodies on suitable persons to undertake that task. I expect, in due course, to publish the results of the inquiry.

RHAs (Appointments)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will announce details of the appointments and re-appointments made to the membership of regional health authorities since 1 October.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The chairmen and members of the regional health authorities, including those members appointed or reappointed from 1 October 1984 are as follows:

NORTHERN REGION

Chairman:

Professor Bernard Tomlinson CBE MD FRCP FRC(Path)

Members:

Les Allen Esq
Tony Brown Esq†
Gordon Carr Esq FCA
Michael Charlton Esq TD JP AI Mech E†
Professor Alex Crombie MB CLB FRCS
Harry Cruddace Esq SRN RMN RNT CNS(Admin) B Ed
Dr Alexander Dellipiani MD FRCP
Dr Peter Dodgson MSc PhD FRSC
Cllr Mrs Shirley Ewart MBE*
Bill Forsyth Esq B Com AIB†
Cllr James Graham†
Cllr Timothy Kirkhope
Mrs Barbara Payne
Cllr Mrs Annie Pratt†
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YORKSHIRE REGION

Chairman:
Bryan Askew Esq
Members:
Ian Cordial Esq MA
Dr George Crouch MB ChB FRCGP Dobst RCOG*
Mrs Irene Endeen SRN HV NDN†
Cllr John Greetham
Brian Heyward Esq JP†
Mrs Yvonne Jackson
Stephen Kaye Esq FCA†
Cllr William Kilgallon MA DSA*
Maurice Kirk Esq MA*
Baroness Masham of Ilton†
Arnold Moore Esq†
Cllr Eric Pickles
Dr Julian Roberts MD FRC Psych DPM
Di Pantar Sen Esq
James Walsh Esq MA
Cllr James West*

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John Blackton Esq FCA*
Mrs Brenda Borrett
Douglas Brown Esq†
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Mrs Joan Dady
Cllr David Jackson
Mrs Rachel Kelly OBE MA
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Dr Ralph Lawrence OBE MB ChB MRCGP DMJ
Cllr John Layden JP†
Professor Donald Munro MD FRCP*
John Pattison Esq BPharm MPS MIPM Dip Ed†
Cllr Harry Seddons
Dr Peter Sewell BSc PhD MB FRCPath
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Michael Spungin Esq OBE MA BLitt*
Cyril Urwin Esq MBE JP

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Marcus Austin Esq JP
Cllr Brigadier Alan Breitmeyer
Edward Broadway Esq BDS FDS D'orth FRC
Professor Sir John Butterfield OBE DM FRCP†
Michael Carttiss Esq MP†
Cllr Jonathen Gault
Raymond Harris Esq FSCA FMS*
John Mowson Esq†
Dr Alexander Nicol MA PhD†
Mrs Jill Swindon SRN*
Roderick Travers Esq
Michael Upcroft Esq JP
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Ron Brown Esq JP
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John McClenahan Esq PhD MA
William Millner Esq MB BS FRCS
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Major General Trevor Hart CB BM FFCM DPH DTMofH*
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Dr Neville Shinton MD FRCP FRCPath
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John Lewis Esq
Robert Martin Esq QC
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Professor Robert Shields MP FRCS FRCS Ed†
Dr Peter Sykes MB ChB LMSSA DPM FRC Psych FRSH
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Robert Hodd Esq BSc Dip Ed
Rodney Ward Esq MA FCA*
Dr Satya Chatterjee OBE JP MBBS FRCP†
Professor Iain Gillespie MB MSc FRCS†
Mrs Christine Harrison JP†
Cllr George MacDonald JP DL†
Mrs Gloria Oates SRN CMB(I) DMS AMBIM†
Keith Walker Esq†

* First time appointments from 1 October 1984
† Reappointment from 1 October 1984

Paediatric Medicines (Sweeteners)

Mr. Charles Morrison asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his policy towards the use of sweeteners in paediatric medicines; what sweeteners are currently approved by his Department and used in manufacture; and how their use is reviewed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *81*.]: There is no comprehensive list of sweeteners approved by the licensing authority for use in medicinal products since all non-active ingredients are evaluated as components of the individual products containing them. The following are the main substances contained in currently licensed medicinal products as sweeteners: sodium cyclamate, saccharin sodium, honey, calcium cyclamate, sorbital solution 70 per cent. syrup, calcium saccharin, saccharin, acesulfame potassium, brown sugar, golden syrup, saccharin sodium-anhydrous, karion 83, feculose, ammoniated glyclyrrhizin, compressible sugar, saccharin solution, celutab, puratose K, aspartame, liquid sugar demineralised, dextrates, liquid sugar gran liquors, hydrogenated glucose syrup.

In deciding whether to licence products containing sweeteners, a number of product-related factors are considered, for example, the pharmaceutical form of the product, the route of administration, the other ingredients, the indications for use and the recommended dosage. The safety of all medicinal products is monitored by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the other Committees set up under the Medicines Act who would advise us if there was a problem related to a particular sweetener.

We have received expert advice that the long-term use of sweeteners containing sucrose in paediatric medicines can cause severe tooth decay and a warning to doctors about this has been included in the British National

Formulary. We are encouraged that a number of manufactures have been able to eliminate sucrose from their paediatric medicines.

Postgraduate Hospitals

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give figures for the London postgraduate hospitals that had their own board of governors before reorganisation, showing the revenue and capital available to each in the last year before reorganisation, and that available in the current year; what was the percentage charge for each; and which are run by special health authorities and which by district health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *475*]: The table shows the revenue cash limits allotted to each of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals for the financial years 1981-82 and 1984-85 and the percentage increase over the period, together with the capital cash limits for these years which reflect the hospitals' capital programmes. Details of the status of their present managing authorities are also set out in the table.

Cash Limits

	Revenue			*Capital (a)*	
	1981-82 £'000	*1984-85 £'000*	*per cent. Increase*	*1981-82 £'000*	*1984-85 £'000*
1	6,166	7,354	19·2	985	
2	9,198	10,778	16·4	525	1,581 (b)
3	5,450	6,419	17·7	150	
				1,570	1,581
4	2,340	2,746	17·3	50	140
5	22,694	26,687	17·6	1,385	959
6	13,209	15,552	17·5	866	1,696
7	9,689	11,447	18·1	1,332	5,034
8	12,713	15,962	25·6	581	438
9	20,972	25,056	19·5	1,241	963
10	14,959	17,796	19·0	570	1,638
11	7,743	9,160	18·3	452	— (c)
12	3,554	4,385	23·4	250	1,840

Notes

a. Comparison between individual 1981-82 and 1984-85 allocations largely invalidated by uneven pattern of capital schemes.

b. Seperate allocations not made in 1984-85.

c. Merged with Hammersmith SHA on 1 April 1984.

POST RESTRUCTURING MANAGING AUTHORITIES

1. The Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospitals
   Bloomsbury HA
2. The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospitals
   Bloomsbury HA
3. St. Peter's Hospitals
   Bloomsbury HA
4. St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin
   West Lambeth HA
5. The Hospitals for Sick Children
   The Hospitals for Sick Children SHA
6. The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases
   The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases SHA
7. Moorfields Eye Hospital
   Moorfields Eye Hospital SHA
8. The Bethlem Royal Hospital and the Maudsley Hospital
   The Bethlem Royal Hospital and the Maudsley Hospital SHA
9. The National Heart and Chest Hospitals
   The National Heart and Chest SHA
10. The Royal Marsden Hospital
    The Royal Marsden SHA
11. Queen Charlotte's Hospital for Women
    Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's SHA
12. The Eastman Dental Hospital
    Eastman Dental Hospital SHA

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Printing Industry

5. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future prospects of the printing industry.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The future prospects of the printing industry lie very largely in the hands of those who work in it. A recent study commissioned by the Printing Industries EDC, on which representatives of management, Government and the unions sit, identified a number of weaknesses which the industry needs to tackle quickly if it is to compete effectively against foreign competition.

British Telecom

11. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies his Department carried out prior to the flotation of British Telecom as to the likely nature and level of demand for shares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: A programme of market research was undertaken in the months before the flotation to help assess the likely public demand for shares; and discussions were held by the Department's advisers with financial institutions in order to assess the institutional demand.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the criteria and circumstances under which the Government will use their shareholding to influence decisions take by British Telecom.

Mr. Butcher: I have nothing to add to the statement in the prospectus:

"Her Majesty's Government does not intend to use its rights as an ordinary shareholder to intervene in the commercial decisions of British Telecom".

Share Ownership

15. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage greater employee participation through the ownership of shares.

Mr. Fletcher: We have just completed the biggest single step so far this century towards wider ownership of shares in British industry. Over 2 million people purchased BT shares, including many first-time investors and 184,000 employees of BT itself. We will continue to encourage wider ownership of shares both by employees and by individual investors.

52. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the encouragement of wider share ownership.

Mr. Fletcher: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins). The Government have taken a number of steps to encourage wider share ownership through the privatisation programme and through the measures taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the tax treatment of share option schemes. We are most encouraged by the response.

Manufacturing Output

22. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the latest available statistics for United Kingdom manufacturing output; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The index of production for the three months to October 1984 is some 2·5 per cent. higher than it was a year ago, and 7·5 per cent. higher than at its last trough in the first quarter of 1981. These figures indicate that manufacturing industry's output is continuing its encouraging recovery.

66. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and how this compares with the figure for the same month in 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: For the three months to October 1984 the index of production for manufacturing industry is 99, based on 1980 equal to 100. This is 7 per cent. lower than the index of production for manufacturing industry in the three months to October 1979.

Manned Space Station Programme

25. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement concerning British participation in the manned space station programme planned by the United States Government.

62. **Mr. Michael Marshall** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make a response to the invitation from the United States Government for British and European Space Agency involvement in the development of manned space stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The Government are giving full consdideration to President Reagan's invitation to participate in an international space station. This proposal is being examined in the context of the long-term plan of the European Space Agency, which is to be discussed at a ministerial council of the agency in January.

Electronics Industry (Labour)

26. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to stimulate the supply of skilled labour in the electronics industry.

Mr. Fletcher: I refer my hon. Friend to the report of the information technology skills shortages committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, a copy of which is in the Library. In this report the committee proposed a new "partnership for change" between industry and the academic world to tackle the problem of IT skill shortages at the graduate level. Action is in hand to put the committee's proposals into effect. The committee is currently considering the question of IT skill shortages at other levels in the work force.

Better Business Service

27. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce in England and Wales a service akin to the Scottish Better Business Service.

Mr. Trippier: I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced on 26 November and 7 December, respectively comparable packages of schemes for England and Wales called "Business Improvement Services".

New Technology (Applications)

28. **Mr. Bright** asked the Secretary of Trade and Industry what measures his Department has introduced to assist small and medium-sized firms in the application of new technologies.

Mr. Trippier: Small and medium sized firms have been eligible to apply for the assistance towards innovative projects that has been available under the Department's support for innovation programme, and many have been helped.

In addition, advisory services and consultancy arrangements set up by the Department have helped small and medium sized firms get access to expert advice about a range of problems.

Invisible Exports

29. **Mr. Franks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage trade in invisible exports.

Mr. Fletcher: The invisibles sectors make an indispensable contribution to the balance of payments and to employment. To help their development, we shall continue to press internationally, and in particular in the European Community and the GATT, for the removal of restrictions which affect British invisible trade in foreign markets.

I strongly support the promotional work of the British Invisible Exports Council and the British Tourist Authority at home and abroad. The British Overseas Trade Board has recently reviewed its assistance to service sector exporters, and will seek to improve it.

Travel Agents (Failure)

30 **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the arrangements currently in existence to compensate holidaymakers when travel agents collapse.

Mr. Fletcher: Yes. There are few service industries in this country where the customer's money is as well protected as in the travel industry. Well over 90 per cent. of retail trade outlets are members of the Association of British Travel Agents which, through its code of practice, provides reimbursement of customers' money in the event of a member's failure.

Shipping Orders

31 **Mr. Hill** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in the third quarter of 1984, how many vessels over 500 deadweight tonnage were ordered for building in the United Kingdom or abroad by United Kingdom shipowners for registration in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the third quarter of 1984 there were six vessels of over 500 DWT ordered under the United Kingdom flag, four of which orders were placed in United Kingdom yards.

Companies Registration Office, Cardiff

32 **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the efficiency of the Companies Registration Office in Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: As announced to the House on 6 April 1984, additional resources have been provided to ensure that the Companies Registration Office can perform its duties more effectively, whilst consideration is given to the future functions, organisation and operations of the office in order to improve further its efficiency.

Steel Pipes (United States Government Talks)

33 **Mr. Skeet** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his talks with the United States Government on steel pipes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The European Commission, which has been conducting discussions on this issue on behalf of the EC, reported to the Industry/Steel Council on 17 December that no basis had yet been identified for a negotiated settlement with the United States Administration. Discussions are continuing both bilaterally and in the framework of GATT.

Small Firms Service

34. **Mr. John Browne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with the current level of publicity for the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: I recently reviewed the level of take-up of the small firms inquiry service and concluded that further publicity is required. The first phase of a new round of national advertising to promote this service was completed in November and further advertisements will appear in 1985. I shall be monitoring the response to this campaign and will take the results into account in planning future publicity.

46. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries the small firms service has answered in the last three months.

Mr. Trippier: During the period August to October 1984 the small firms service answered 64,610 inquiries.

53. **Mr. Cartiss** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many business counsellors are under contract to the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: At 30 November there were 261 business counsellors under contract to the Department of Trade and Industry providing advice to small firms in England. In Scotland and Wales, business counselling is provided by the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies.

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to extend the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: No. The small firms service was strengthened in 1983. In that year a new small firms centre was opened in Reading and the counselling resources were expanded in order to assist more small businesses, in particular those arising through the expanded enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he has taken to improve the speed of response of the small firms service.

Mr. Trippier: The small firms service is regularly reviewed with a view to improving the speed and quality of response. During 1984, a microcomputer system, a major objective of which is to provide a faster and more comprehensive service to inquirers, has been installed in all small firms centres in England, except the Cambridge centre, which will receive its system early next year.

Northern Region

35. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate his Department has made of the annual reduction in regional development grants to the northern region, as a result of the measures announced on 28 November.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates of the reduction in annual expenditure on regional development grants have not been made in respect of individual planning regions in England.

Small Firms

36. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to increase the level of advice on marketing available to small firms from his Department.

Mr. Trippier: On 26 November I launched a new package of assistance for small firms in English areas affected by job losses in the steel, shipbuilding and textile industries. The package—known as business improvement services (BIS)—includes grants towards the cost of consultancy advice on developing a marketing strategy. There are also grants for specific market research and for translations of market information and sales literature. Copies of the publicity leaflets for BIS have been placed in the Library.

The British Overseas Trade Board provides a range of assistance which can help the smaller exporter with marketing overseas.

56. **Mr. Grylls** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to reduce the level of Government-imposed burdens on small firms.

Mr. Trippier: Progress has already been made in reducing the level of Government-imposed burdens on small firms. An inter-departmental scrutiny is now being carried out on administrative and legislative burdens and will report in January 1985. I hope this will result in recommendations for further reductions in burdens, to which this Government attach great importance.

61. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to inform professional advisers about the help available to small firms through Government schemes.

Mr. Trippier: My Department is sponsoring further seminars in the "Help for Growing Businesses" series early in 1985. These will be held at 50 venues throughout England and Wales to stress the importance of business planning and financial control in small firms and will also provide an opportunity to inform professional advisers about relevent changes to Government schemes and new initiatives.

63. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department is doing to improve management education and training in small firms.

Mr. Trippier: My Department seeks to stimulate the provision of management education and training for small firms which is both accessible and appropriate to their particular needs. Those running small firms can take advantage of the many courses offered by educational establishments, including the enterprise training funded by the Manpower Services Commission which is being increased. I am encouraging awareness of the value of training and my Department will be running a Local Enterprise Week in May 1985 which will give it prominence. Linked to the May event will be the launch of a video sponsored by my Department and the MSC to stimulate small firms to undertake training.

Copyright

37. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received any representations on reform of the existing legislation on copyright.

Mr. Fletcher: Following publication in 1981 of the Government's Green Paper "Reform of the Law relating to Copyright, Designs and Performers' Protection" (Cmnd. 8302), my Department has received several hundred comments on all aspects of copyright. In recent weeks Ministers have received representations on home taping, record rental and software piracy.

45. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to reform the Copyright Act 1956.

Mr. Channon: Work is continuing in my Department on a comprehensive reform of the Copyright Act 1956, but it is not possible at this stage to say when a Bill will be introduced. However significant amendments to the Act in respect of video and record piracy and cable and satellite television have already been brought into effect.

Research and Development Assistance

38. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations from industry his Department has received concerning his statement on 12 November regarding the moratarium on research and development assistance.

Mr. Fletcher: As at 13 December, written representations had been received from 20 individuals, firms or organisations.

44. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the General Electric Company concerning his statement on 12 November on the moratorium on research and development assistance.

Mr. Fletcher: Dealings between the Department and individual companies take place in confidence.

Industrial Building Allowance

39. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of industrial building allowances in encouraging the provision of new and refurbished small unit accommodation by the private sector.

Mr. Trippier: The Department of Trade and Industry's preliminary study on the effect of the 100 per cent. industrial building allowance for small industrial premises published in 1982 found that the number of small workshops provided each year had probably tripled since the allowance was introduced and that, in the areas surveyed, the private sector share of the market rose from 39 per cent. to 79 per cent. of the units built. I am currently carrying out a more detailed review of the effect of the allowance and will publish the results on its completion.

British Telecom (Tenders)

40. **Mr. Golding** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to seek to prevent British Telecommunications plc from asking only foreign-owned companies to tender for alternative switching equipment to system X.

Mr. Fletcher: British Telecom is now a private company and its final choice of second source supplier of switching equipment must be its own commercial decision.

Local Authorities (Trading Standards)

41. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how it is intended to staff the joint committees charged under schedule 8 to the Local Government Bill with the co-ordination of the implementation by metropolitan district councils of their responsibilities for trading standards under the Weights and Measures Act 1963.

Mr. Fletcher: The Local Government Bill provides for the joint committees to comprise members nominated by the district councils in each metropolitan county. The committees will not employ staff, but will draw their support from the districts which will share the costs equitably.

Brazil

42. **Mr. John David Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage the development of trade with Brazil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: Through the British Overseas Trade Board, my Department provides United Kingdom industry with advice and a wide range of services in support of its efforts in the market.

Small Firms (Purchasing Contracts)

43. **Mr. John Townend** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the proportion of purchasing contracts from central and local government received by small firms.

Mr. Trippier: Records are not kept on the proportion of Government procurement contracts that go to small firms. However, the Ministry of Defence is currently collecting information on the value of its direct contracts placed with small and medium-sized firms in the present financial year. Local authorities are responsible for their own purchasing. I am not aware of any systematic information available on the proportion of their purchasing contracts received by small firms.

Amble

47. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why he has excluded Amble from regional development status under his recently announced proposals.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Amble is part of the Alnwick and Amble travel-to-work area. That area certainly has an unemployment rate which is above the national average, but this is true of many areas which are not included in the new assisted areas map. Furthermore, in reaching decisions on the new map, we took account not just of employment but of a number of other factors, too. On the overall criteria used for making comparisons with the country generally, the Alnwick and Amble travel-to-work area did not justify assisted area status.

Regional Development Grant

48. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate his Department made of the expected annual reduction in regional development grants to Wales prior to the announcement of 28 November.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Payments under the old RDG scheme will continue for some time under the transitional arrangements. However, by 1987-88 expenditure on regional development grants in respect of Wales was estimated to be about £75 million less as a result of the new policy.

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the total of regional development grant paid in the Corby development area in *(a)* 1983-84 and *(b)* 1984-85 to date.

Mr. Trippier: The information available in respect of regional development grant paid in the Corby development area in the periods specified is given in the following table:

Corby Development Area *£'000*

*Regional Development Grant (Part II of the Industrial Development Act 1982)**	*1983-84*	*1984-85 (to 30.9.84)*
Grant paid	6,505	1,031

* Total of payments over £25,000 only. Grant payments of £25,000 or less cannot be attributed to any unit smaller than a planning region.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amount paid out in regional development grants for the last financial year for *(a)* England, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* Wirral.

Mr. Trippier: The information available in respect of regional development grant paid in 1983-84 in respect of the areas specified is given in the following table:

Regional development grant paid under part II of the Industrial Development Act 1982

	1983-84 £'000
England	223,832
Merseyside *(a)*	*(c)* 61,391
Wirral *(b)*	*(c)* 35,804

(a) Merseyside comprises the Merseyside metropolitan county and those parts of the former Merseyside special development area outside Merseyside metropolitan county.

(b) Wirral is conterminous with what was the Birkenhead travel-to-work area (TTWA).

(c) Total of payments of £25,000 only. Grant payments of £25,000 or less cannot be attributed to any unit smaller than a planning region.

Local Enterprise Agencies

49. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many local enterprise agencies are in existence; and how many are in the process of being set up.

Mr. Trippier: There are 233 local enterprise agencies in existence, including all those organisations which, under section 48 of the Finance Act 1982, have been approved as local enterprise agencies. Some 35 more are in varying stages of formation.

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many local enterprise agencies have been approved for tax relief.

Mr. Trippier: I am pleased to say that to date 185 local enterprise agencies have been approved for tax relief purposes.

Leicester

50. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to stimulate the traditional industries of the city of Leicester.

Mr. Trippier: The Government's overall economic policies are designed to create a favourable environment for business in which all firms, including those engaged in traditional activities, can become more competitive.

Knitted Goods (Imports)

51. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent imports of knitted goods from Portugal and Turkey, in the last available 12 month period, are in excess of that permitted in the voluntary restraint agreements.

Mr. Channon: The Portuguese authorities have firmly assured the Commission that their newly introduced export management system will enable them fully to respect the levels agreed between them and the Community in respect of their exports of knitted goods for 1984. It does not appear that Portuguese export authorisations for these goods have so far exceeded those levels, but officials are keeping a close watch on these statistics together with those for actual imports into the United Kingdom this year.

There is no voluntary restraint arrangement between the Community and Turkey covering knitted goods. Quotas have been established under the safeguard provisions of the EC-Turkey association agreement on a number of knitted products and these are being fully enforced.

Small Businesses

54. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take further steps to encourage small businesses.

Mr. Trippier: We are committed to building on the progress already made, in particular by reducing burdens and promoting awareness of the help available to small firms. Small Firms Local Enterprise Week, to be held

from 15 to 24 May 1985, will provide a good opportunity to publicise the wide range of local initiatives to encourage small firms.

Manufacturers' Products (Register)

55. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish a central register of British manufacturers' products.

Mr. Trippier: I have at present no plans to do so. In general, information services of this kind are best provided by the private sector.

Fraud

57. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with current measures taken to deal with City fraud.

Mr. Fletcher: I believe that the measures the Government have already announced and others which will be announced shortly will provide stronger weapons for dealing with financial fraud.

Information Technology (R and D)

58. **Mr. Penhaligon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline what the Government's policy is on providing support for research and development for information technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Information technology is one of the few high growth sectors of economies throughout the world. In recognition of its unique significance, this Government have, since 1979, devoted increasing funds to support the development of information technology in the United Kingdom and have engaged in or encouraged a range of programmes aimed at stimulating the use of IT and awareness of its potential benefits.

The Government's commitment to ensuring a healthy United Kingdom IT industry in the longer term has been demonstrated by their support for the five-year pre-competitive Alvey research programme; and for the ESPRIT programme, which is also strengthening industry and Government collaboration at European level.

The Government remain committed to supporting innovative developments likely to lead to internationally competitive products and to promoting their successful use in the United Kingdom environment. The success of the DTI's support schemes has led to the recently announced moratorium on further applications. I shall be in a position to make a statement on the future orientation of R and D support on completion of the current review.

Hire Purchase Act 1964

59 **Mr. Heddle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to conduct a review of the Hire Purchase Act 1964.

Mr. Fletcher: I have no plans to do so.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

60 **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to make an announcement about the future of the loan guarantee scheme beyond the end of 1984.

Mr. Trippier: An announcement on the extension of the loan guarantee scheme until the end of 1985 was made on 17 December 1984.

Patents Office (Green Paper)

64 **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, of the representations he has received in respect of the Patents Office, arising from the Green Paper on intellectual property, how many have expressed unconditional support for recommendation No.1.

Mr. Channon: Six of the 50 representations we have received on recommendation No.1. of the Green Paper "Intellectual Property Rights and Innovation" (Cmnd.9117), that is, that the Patent Office should become a separate statutory body, have expressed unconditional support. Ten of the remaining representations on this recommendation have expressed support, subject only to provisos on implementation.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement

65 **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he now expects the publication of the Silberston Report on the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Trippier: Professor Silberston's report on the multi-fibre arrangement and the United Kingdom economy was published on 13 December. Its findings are summarised in an answer given to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South East (Mr Lightbown) on that day.

Manufactured Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the figures for total manufactured exports to the United States of America for 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 and the first, second and third quarters of 1984, together with the rate of increase or decrease, for the United Kingdom, West Germany, Japan, Sweden and France.

Mr. Channon: The figures, in both national currencies and United States dollars for the years 1979 to 1983 and the available information for 1984 are in the table.

Exports of Manufactures to USA*
National Currencies

	United Kingdom £ million	Percentage change	Federal Republic of Germany mil. DM	Percentage change	Japan bil. Yen	Percentage change	Sweden mil. Kronor	Percentage change	France mil. Francs	Percentage change
1979	3,003		19,483		5,697		6,754		17,230	
1980	3,254	+ 8·4	20,139	+ 3·4	7,019	+23·2	6,805	+ 0·8	17,180	+ 3·4
1981	3,527	+ 8·4	24,441	+21·4	8,422	+20·0	8,597	+26·3	26,282	+47·6
1982	3,809	+ 8·0	26,643	+ 9·0	8,936	+ 6·1	11,600	+34·9	29,847	+13·6
1983	5,032	+32·1	30,891	+15·9	10,070	+12·7	17,639	+52·1	37,363	+25·2
1984 Q1	1,447		10,290		..		6,529		12,270	
Q2	1,553		..		..		6,317		..	
Q3	1,526		..		..		..		..	

US$ Million

	United Kingdom	Percentage change	Federal Republic of Germany	Percentage change	Japan	Percentage change	Sweden	Percentage change	France	Percentage change
1979	6,370		10,629		25,999		1,576		4,050	
1980	7,570	+18·8	11,079	+ 4·2	30,956	+19·1	1,609	+ 2·1	4,214	+ 4·1
1981	7,153	−5·5	10,815	− 2·4	38,189	+23·4	1,698	+ 5·5	4,836	+14·8
1982	6,668	− 6·8	10,979	+ 1·5	35,879	− 6·1	1,846	+ 8·7	4,541	− 6·1
1983	7,633	+14·5	12,098	+10·2	42,396	+18·2	2,301	+24·6	4,902	+ 8·0
1984 Q1	2,076		3,812		..		819		1,480	
Q2	2,170		..		..		789		..	
Q3	1,980		..		..		..		..	

Note *Standard International Trade Classifications, Sections 5 to 8.
.. not available.
Sources: OECD, Eurostat and National Sources.

Tourism (Merseyside)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to seek to establish a tourist authority for Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Merseyside is already covered by the North-West Tourist Board which is one of the 12 regional tourist boards fostered and partially financed by the English Tourist Board. The establishment of local tourist groups is a matter for local interests.

Net Book Agreement

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he or the Director General of Fair Trading have received concerning the operation of the net book agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations on this subject and nor, I understand, has the Director General of Fair Trading.

The net book agreement was considered by the Restrictive Practices Court in 1962 and judged not to be contrary to the public interest. The Director General of Fair Trading keeps the operation of the agreement under review.

Imported Electrical Goods

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the methods used by the United States Government for ensuring that imported electrical goods comply with domestic electrical safety legislation.

Mr. Channon: Electrical goods in the United States must comply with basic regulations set out in the United States code of federal regulations. In addition, although not mandatory in any state, electrical goods marketed in the United States generally bear the seal of approval of the Underwriters Laboratories (UL). The seal of approval is widely regarded as a guarantee of quality and safety and is effectively a commercial necessity for both domestic and foreign manufacturers. Testing for purposes of the UL seal of approval can be carried out only in the United States.

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recommendations his Department makes to trading standards authorities regarding the provision of facilities to test imported electrical goods whose safety is suspect.

Mr. Fletcher: My Department does not formally make recommendations on the facilities required by local authorities to carry out tests on imported electrical goods, although a wide range of topics concerning product safety are discussed from time to time. However, in the majority of cases where a trading standards authority decides to prosecute a supplier of dangerous electrical goods, the authority is required to use one of three test houses approved for the purpose by the Secretary of State. These test houses have been approved for their expertise in interpreting the requirements and the tests that are needed under the provisions of the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations.

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assurances he has sought from the Yugoslavian authorities that electric lamps being supplied

by that country to the United Kingdom are manufactured in compliance with the electrical equipment safety regulations.

Mr. Fletcher: None. It is the responsibility of the importer of electric lamps manufactured in Yugoslavia to ensure that they comply with the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations.

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's practice in seeking to ensure that imported electrical consumer goods from outside the European Economic Community comply with the low voltage directive; and what information he has as to the comparable measures taken in France.

Mr. Fletcher: Electrical products which operate within a specified voltage range are required to comply with the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations and thereby achieve the level of safety required by the low voltage directive. The regulations apply to electrical goods offered for supply in the United Kingdom, wherever manufactured.

My officials have recently discussed the laws applicable to the safety of goods with their French counterparts and concluded that the measures adopted in that country are not significantly different from those in the United Kingdom.

Ferrous Scrap

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the amount by which the prices of ferrous scrap have risen since May 1979; and whether the Government have any plans for controlling the price of such scrap.

Mr. Trippier: The average price of the main grades of ferrous steel scrap has risen by 20 per cent. since May 1979.

The Government have no plans to control the price of such scrap.

Steel Industry (Joint Ventures)

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all the joint companies that have been established between private firms and the British Steel Corporation since May 1979 to the present date; if he will also give the total value of the British Steel Corporation assets concerned; and what amount the private sector paid for them.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EC (Trade Statistics)

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of consumer goods imported into the European Community from the near east and far east come into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Channon: In 1982 direct imports into the United Kingdom from the near east and the far east accounted for 45 per cent. and 28 per cent. respectively, of direct imports into the European Community as a whole. Information for any later period could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Technical Ceramics

Mr. Bulmer asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what resources are being devoted by his Department to the research and development of technical ceramics.

Mr. Trippier: The Department expects to spend about £1·5 million in the current financial year in support of research and development on technical ceramics. Of this sum, approximately £500,000 will be in industrial companies, £450,000 in the Department's own laboratories and £550,000 at other research establishments. Expenditure next year is expected to exceed £2 million, of which more than £900,000 will be in industry.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Fisher asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the current trend of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the first 10 months of this year exports of manufactures were 8·5 per cent. higher than last year in volume terms. That was an encouraging increase.

Israel (Common External Tariff)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the incidence of third countries using the free trade agreement between the European Economic Community and Israel in order to circumvent the common external tariff for certain industrial goods.

Mr. Channon: I have no information that there are any goods being imported into the Community duty-free from Israel which are not of Israeli origin for the purposes of the Community's agreement with Israel.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he will take to maintain Export Credits Guarantee Department support for United Kingdom trade with countries which have rescheduled some of their officially guaranteed debt but which, nevertheless, are taking vigorous and effective action to deal with their economic problems.

Mr. Channon: I recognise the value of maintaining trading links wherever possible with such countries. Consequently I now intend to allow ECGD greater flexibility so that, in appropriate cases, cover may be restored at an earlier stage after the rescheduling of officially guaranteed debts. This cover will be given for exports of United Kingdom goods and services contributing to the economic recovery of the debtor country and will be provided under ECGD's section 2 (national interest) powers. However, in the light of previous assurances that have been given to Parliament about the use of these powers, I would make it clear that use of this discretion will be selective and only authorised where we are satisfied that the debtor country is taking appropriate action in dealing with its problems. I would stress that this does not represent any relaxation of ECGD's general standards of assessing country risks on overseas markets.

Whilst I would expect that ECGD cover in these circumstances could be provided on a break-even basis over the longer term, I recognise that the provision of new cover to countries carrying a heavy debt burden does involve a high degree of risk. For this reason, it is intended to control its use especially carefully. However, it has been agreed that the financial outturn of this business will not affect the level of ECGD's premium charges for other categories of business.

This modest improvement in ECGD's arrangements should not only assist United Kingdom exporters to maintain a stake in overseas markets which are in the process of recovering from debt service difficulties; it should also help in the present international debt situation by providing an incentive to the debtor countries to adopt vigorous adjustment policies, usually in conjunction with an IMF programme. Decisions on the resumption of cover for particular debtor countries will be announced by ECGD from time to time.

Commercial Bills

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to reduce the delays in payment of commercial bills by Her Majesty's Government to smaller firms.

Mr. Trippier: I am not aware how far this is a significant problem, but if my hon. Friend has some specific evidence I would certainly like to examine it with the Department concerned.

Spain (Motor Vehicles)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about new Government initiatives to introduce fair competition and an equalisation of tariffs in the motor vehicle exports to, and imports from, Spain.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *86*]: I can inform my hon. Friend that an agreement was reached between the Community and Spain on industrial tariffs at the ministerial meeting on 18 December. Duties in trade between the United Kingdom and Spain will be eliminated seven years after accession. Tariffs will be dismantled in both directions (on the assumption that accession takes place on 1 January 1986 as planned) as follows:

	Percentage
1 March 1986	10
1 January 1987	12·5
1 January 1988	15
1 January 1989	15
1 January 1990	12·5
1 January 1991	12·5
1 January 1992	12·5
1 January 1993	10

This means that three years after accession, Spain's highly protective duties on industrial products will have been more than halved.

This system will apply to all duties, including that on cars. There will, however, be in addition a reduced duty quota for cars from the EC of 32,000 in 1986, 36,000 in 1987 and 40,000 in 1988. These figures include a reserve of 4,000 cars, 2,000 of which will be specifically allocated to the United Kingdom for use in respect of cars of any capacity. The remainder of the quota will be available for all. Given that the United Kingdom has 15 per cent. of the existing car quotas, the Government are confident that, taking the two elements together, the total United Kingdom share of the quota will be around 5,000 in year one, rising appreciably thereafter. The duty rate for the quota will be 17·4 per cent. compared with a weighed average of 23 per cent. under the existing quota.

The Government believe that this settlement offers United Kingdom manufacturers, both of cars and of other products, major new opportunities in the Spanish market.

Quite separately, I am hopeful that the Spanish Government will make interim improvements to existing quotas for the period 1 July to 31 December 1985. These should yield an increase of about 50 per cent. (on an annualised basis) on existing United Kingdom quota allocation.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of loans from the loan guarantee scheme has gone to start-up firms.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *127*]: At 30 November 1984, 52 per cent. of loans had gone to start-up firms.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money the Government have received to date in premiums.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *127*]: At 30 November 1984, £16·2 million had been received in premiums.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms to date have benefited from the loan guarantee scheme.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *127*]: At 30 November 1984, 15,717 guarantees had been issued although approximately 700 firms have had two guarantees.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total money guaranteed so far under the loan guarantee scheme.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to the reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *127*]: At 30 November 1984, loans totalling £513 million had been guaranteed.

Trafalgar House

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there have been any cash payments to Trafalgar House, directly or indirectly, in respect of its purchase of Scott Lithgow, since the answer of 9 April, *Official Report*, column *19;* and whether any additional payments are now anticipated.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to the reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *127*]: Under the terms of sale of Scott Lithgow, British Shipbuilders (BS) has contingent liabilities in respect of:

(i) certain sub-contracted steelwork for the Britoil rig, whose quality was in doubt. Payments totalling £1 million have been made and a further cost of £1 million is expected to arise;

(ii) benefits, equivalent to the shipbuilding redundancy payments scheme, to a maximum of 1,600 workers who might be made redundant within a year of the sale.

Payments totalling £400,000 have been made so far. Further costs will depend on the extent of further redundancies;

(iii) any additional costs arising from the settlement of the completion accounts relating to the sale.

Agreement has yet to be reached and it is not possible at this stage to forecast what, if any, payments will be necessary. In addition, and also under the terms of the sale, BS had paid £16 million in liquidated damages to BP in respect of the late delivery of the oil rig almost completed by Scott Lithgow and currently undergoing sea trials.

BS will also receive this year £3 million from Trafalgar House as part of the £12 million consideration to be paid over four years.

SCOTLAND

Tourism

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will collect and publish accurate statistics on an annual basis, showing the number of people employed in the tourism industry in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Separate figures for Scotland for the industries most clearly related to tourism are available from the detailed census of employment. Figures for September 1981 were published in the supplement to the December 1983 issue of the *Employment Gazette*. Figures for September 1984 will be published in due course. As regards estimates of GB employment and the definitional difficulties in this field, I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 14 December, at column 630, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment.

Police (Pay)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current rates of basic pay for each rank in the police force; what additional emoluments are payable; and what were the comparable figures in each of the last five years expressed in cash terms and in annual percentage increases.

Mr. Ancram: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dental Services

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what share of the costs of general dental services in Scotland was borne by the Exchequer in 1983-84;

(2) by what percentage the maximum charge to the patient for routine dental treatment has increased between April 1979 and April 1984.

Mr. John MacKay: 75·4 per cent. and 190 per cent. respectively.

Public Sector Industies (Capital Assets)

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the value of the capital assets, including land, of *(a)* the South of Scotland Electricity Board, *(b)* Highlands and Islands Development Board, *(c)* the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board and *(d)* public sector ports.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information for the South of Scotland Electricity Board, the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board and the Highlands and Islands Development Board is contained in their annual reports and accounts, copies of which are held in the Library. For public sector ports the information is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Rent and Rebate Schemes

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Scottish Development Department circular letter 72/1972 concerning the disregarding of war disablement and war pensions for the purposes of rent and rebate schemes.

Mr. Ancram: On 1 April 1983 the rent rebate scheme was replaced by housing benefit, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. As a consequence, SDD circular letter 72/1972 has been cancelled.

School Books and Equipment

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure on *(a)* books and *(b)* equipment per pupil in each education authority in each year since 1980; and what is the corresponding figure for Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The available information, complied from local authority expenditure returns, is shown in the following table. Expenditure on educational equipment and materials was not separately identified in these returns before 1982-83. Figures for individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variation in items included in the returns under the two categories in question.

Net school expenditure per full-time equivalent pupil on (a) text and library books and (b) educational equipment and materials

Education Authority	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*		*1983-84*	
	(a)	*(a)*	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*
Borders	6·05	7·68	9·84	—	4·71	0·12
Central	6·06	7·17	*1·30	23·71	28·04	
Dumfries and Galloway	6·50	6·48	7·58	15·77	7·93	23·67
Fife	7·09	8·01	6·56	14·05	20·57	7·3
Grampian	19·58	7·93	8·63	17·87	8·02	21·80
Highland	6·75	21·16	24·64	12·00	42·11	
Lothian	7·40	6·56	6·13	19·06	6·26	18·04
Strathclyde	6·15	7·51	8·73	16·31	7·65	16·42
Tayside	3·70	4·13	4·48	25·48	5·26	27·80
Orkney	18·58	15·99	10·48	21·25	n.a.	n.a.

Education Authority	1980-81 (a)	1981-82 (a)	1982-83 (a)	(b)	1983-84 (a)	(b)
Shetland	8·64	11·93	15·21	—	n.a.	n.a.
Western Isles	11·93	35·27	29·27	27·50	16·52	45·48

Returns for 1983-84 have not yet been submitted for Orkney and Shetland and figures for Highland and Central regions are available only on aggregate. The figures for expenditure in Scotland in 1983-84 therefore excludes their areas.

Scotland	7·30	8·03	8·34	17·26	+8·31	+17·62

* Library books only.

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) on how many occasions in 1982-83 and 1983-84 the Forestry Commission issued felling licences, which permitted felling of broadleaved woods, without there being conditions attached for the replanting solely of braodleaved trees; and how many hectares of woodland this totalled in each year;

(2) on how many occasions in 1982-83 and 1983-84 the Forestry Commission issued felling licences which permitted the clear-felling of broadleaved woodlands for conversion to agricultural land; and how many hectares of woodland this totalled in each case.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland why, when a local authority objects or recommends amendments to a felling licence application, the Forestry Commission does not always inform the local authority of its decision relating to that application.

Mr. John MacKay: It is the practice of the Forestry Commission in these circumstances to discuss the application with the local authority and the applicant, as appropriate, and to inform the local authority of the decision eventually reached.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that no further ancient semi-natural woodlands on the Forestry Commission's estate are clear-felled until such time as the Forestry Commission produces its policy statement on broadleaved woodland in Britain.

Mr. John MacKay: It is the Forestry Commission's intention that ancient semi-natural woods identified on its land will be managed in accordance with guidelines to be agreed with the Nature Conservancy Council.

In the meantime, however, the commission will follow the spirit of these proposed arrangements.

Housing Revenue (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will express the total of Dundee district council's housing revenue for each year since 1980-81 in percentage terms of rents, housing support grant and rate fund contribution.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Housing Revenue Account

	Housing Support Grant percentage	Rate Fund contribution percentage	Rents percentage	Other income percentage
1980-81	31	*−1	55	15
1981-82	22	23	52	3
1982-83	8	25	64	3
1983-84	—	29	69	2
1984-85	—	27	70	3

* Negative quantity indicates contribution from housing revenue account to authority's general fund.

Source:

1980-81 to 1983-84: Returns to Scottish Development Department.

1984-85: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting Rating Review Part 1 (June 1984).

Fines (Enforcement)

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the report of the fines enforcement officer experiments in Airdrie and Edinburgh to be published.

Mr. Younger: The report of the experiments has now been evaluated and is being published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The results of the experiments in Edinburgh and Airdrie are encouraging and I have already announced our intention to extend the scheme to other sheriff courts in Scotland as resources permit. We have for some time been concerned at the number of prison sentences served for non-payment of fines. We expect the introduction of a fines officer scheme to help to reduce these numbers and at the same time increase revenue from fines.

Shipping Services

Mr. Malone asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance he proposes for shipping services to the Scottish islands in 1985-86.

Mr. Younger: I propose to give deficit grants of £7·5 million to Caledonian MacBrayne and £0·95 million to the Orkney Islands Shipping Company. I propose also to provide support for P and O and bulk shipping operators to allow them to continue to rebate the fares and charges

on their services on the present basis of discounts. I have therefore made provision of £3·4 million for P and O and £1·5 million for the bulk shippers.

In total, Government revenue support 1985-86 will amount to some £13·35 million, an increase of 8·6 per cent. over the sum which I estimate will be required in the current financial year.

Septic Tanks

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to which local authorities in Scotland have opted to undertake the emptying of all septic tanks within *(a)* their entire area or *(b)* any part of their area, in terms of section 10(1) of the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not held centrally. It is for local sewerage authorities to decide their policies on this from time to time.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 December 1984

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Council

Mr. Wallace asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on the outcome of the European Economic Community Council of Fisheries Ministers held on 19 December.

Mr. Jopling: Together with my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State in my Department, I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 19 December.

The Commission completed its proposals for the total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for 1985, following the agreement which it had reached with Norway on 13 December on arrangements for 1985 for the full range of stocks subject to the EC-Norway fisheries agreement, with the exception of North sea herring. On this stock the Commission proposed a provisional TAC and quotas for the member states in the Community sector pending the completion of negotiations with Norway in the course of 1985. The Commission also submitted for approval the outcome of its negotiations with the Faroe Islands and Spain on the arrangements for 1985 under the fisheries agreements with these countries. In addition, the Commission put forward a proposal for a Council regulation providing interim arrangements for fishing by member states in Greenland waters pending ratification of the treaty on Greenland's withdrawal and the associated agreement on fisheries.

Negotiations proceeded on the basis of these proposals into the early hours of the morning, when the Presidency and the Commission were able to put forward a compromise package to which all other member states were able to give their agreement. I considered that this package was a very satisfactory one for the United Kingdom too, but in view of the recommendation of the Select Committee on European Legislation I entered a formal reservation on the adoption of the regulations for 1985 pending a debate in the House, which I hope it will be possible to hold shortly after the Christmas recess. In order that fishing should not be interrupted I agreed that the regulations in question should be adopted on an interim basis to 20 January only, pending clarification of the United Kingdom position following completion of parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

The House will be given a full account of the compromise package in the forthcoming debate. It contains significant improvements in the availabilities for our fishermen for all the important North sea white fish stocks and for a number of the flatfish stocks in the south-west and western waters. In no case are any of these quotas lower than for 1984. There is also a significant increase in the availability, and improvement in the distribution, of North Sea herring and, pending agreement on a definitive allocation of the stock for 1985, there will be no Norwegian fishing for herring in the Community sector of the North Sea. The quotas allocated to Norway and the Faroes for 1985 for certain pelagic stocks of particular interest to United Kingdom fishermen have been reduced.

The quotas allocated to Spain for hake, monk, megrim, and other by-catch species are the same as those for 1984 but there is a downward adjustment of the number of licences for Spanish vessels in those fisheries.

Finally, under other business I raised the question of Community logbooks. I received a firm assurance that the logbooks, which had now been distributed, would be in force from 1 April 1985.

This was an important Council meeting which led to a very satisfactory settlement for the United Kingdom and I am glad to report that it was warmly welcomed by the representatives of the fishing industry.

Agricultural Land (Drainage)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hectares of agricultural land have been drained with grant-aid in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that this information is not available.

Milk (Outgoers Scheme)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will modify the outgoers scheme to allow producers to surrender a proportion of their allocated quotas.

Mr. MacGregor: Council regulation 857/84 authorises member states to introduce outgoers schemes and pay compensation only to those who give up milk production definitively. It is not therefore possible to allow producers to surrender part of their quota.

Pesticides

Mr. Cartwright asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many insect pests of *(a)* cereals, *(b)* potatoes, *(c)* apples and *(d)* sugar beet are now wholly or partly resistant to insecticides or acaricides cleared under the pesticides safety precautions scheme.

Mrs. Fenner: Confirmed evidence of insecticide or acaricide resistance is as follows:

(a) standing cereal crops—none
(b) potatoes—one (peach potato aphid)
(c) apples one (fruit tree red spider mite)
(d) sugar beet—one (peach potato aphid)

Salmon

Dr. Cunningham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions he proposes to take in the light of the recommendations of the report of the salmon sales group of the National Water Council on salmon conservation.

Mr. MacGregor: As I said in reply to the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) on 20 November, at column 100, we are examining the practical difficulties of establishing effective control on the lines recommended by the Salmon Sales Group of the former

National Water Council and no decisions can be taken until we have the measure of the practical implications of such a scheme.

ENVIRONMENT

Empty Properties

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the circular to local authorities setting out ways in which better management practices can reduce the number of empty dwellings as soon as it is sent out.

Sir George Young: Yes.

Council House Sales

Mr. William Powell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list details of council housing to sitting tenants up to the latest convenient date by districts in the county of Northampton; and what is the percentage of relevant stock sold.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction on 14 December 1984, at column 644.

Pesticides

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring of pesticide pollution of the atmosphere is carried out in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave: Monitoring of pesticides in the atmosphere is carried out on a case-by-case basis for the purposes of specific research or where a specific problem requires investigation. Routine general monitoring of ambient levels of pesticides in the atmosphere is not thought to be necessary or justified.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those pesticides which have been detected in groundwater and in river waters in each of the water authority regions in England in each of the last five years;

(2) what monitoring of pesticide contamination of groundwater and of river water is carried out in each of the water authority regions in England;

(3) if he will list those pesticides known to occur or to have occurred in drinking water supplied to consumers in *(a)* Cardiff, *(b)* London, *(c)* Edinburgh and *(d)* Birmingham in each of the last five years.

Mr. Macfarlane: Data on pesticides detected in rivers and groundwater are not held centrally. However, all water authorities monitor their surface waters for the main organochlorine pesticide compounds. The general levels do not give cause for concern, either for human health or for aquatic life.

As there is less information on the newer pesticides which are replacing the organochlorines, the Department of the Environment is sponsoring exploratory surveys of these substances at some 250 sites in the United Kingdom.

Groundwaters are not generally monitored for pesticides except when they are used for water supplies.

Traces of atrazone, simazine, lindane and dieldrin have been detected in London water supplies in the last year at concentrations well below any known health risk.

No pesticides have been detected in Birmingham water supplies. My Department does not have information on pesticide concentrations in water supplies for earlier years, or for Cardiff or Edinburgh.

House Improvement Grants

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amount paid out for the last financial year in house improvement grants for *(a)* England, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* Wirral.

Sir George Young: Latest estimates of local authorities' expenditure on renovation grants in 1983-84 are £911 million in England, £35 million in Merseyside metropolitan county and £12 million by Wirral metropolitan borough council.

Urban Aid Grants

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sum paid out for the last financial year under sections 5 and 6 of urban aid grants for *(a)* England, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* Wirral metropolitan district.

Sir George Young: Local authorities for the districts designated under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 and the urban development corporations supply returns on a calendar year basis for the United Kingdom's annual report to the European Commission on the operation of that Act. These returns indicate that expenditure under sections 5 and 6 of the Act in England Merseyside and Wirral during 1983 was as follows:

		£ million	
England*	Section 5	1·781	3·842
	Section 6	2·061	
Merseyside	Section 5	0·412	1·028
	Section 6	0·616	
Wirral	Section 5	0·088	0·128
	Section 6	0·040	

* One authority (not in Merseyside) had not provided returns for 1983.

Derelict Land Grants

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the latest available date the amount paid in derelict land grants to *(a)* public bodies and *(b)* private owners for (i) England, (ii) Merseyside and (iii) Wirral.

Mr. Macfarlane: As at 18 December the amounts paid so far in derelict land grants for the current financial year are as follows:

	Grants to public bodies £	*Grants to private persons or companies* £
England	40,628,820	1,917,559
Merseyside*	1,758,911	218,506
Wirral	117,271	Nil

* Excluding Wirral Borough Council.

Merseyside Task Force

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish details on an annual basis

of the budget of the Merseyside task force since its inception; and if he will break these sums down between Wirral and the rest of Merseyside.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have made funds available from my Department's programmes to support special initiatives on Merseyside. The money has been and is being spent on a wide variety of programmes and projects aimed at helping to tackle Merseyside's problems. Those funds have been substantially supported by Exchequer grant and have been administered by the Merseyside task force. They resulted in an outturn of £11·5 million in 1982-83 and £38·45 million in 1983-84; £35 million has been allocated in 1984-85. The figures for Wirral are £1·25 million in 1982-83; £4·29 million in 1983-84 and, to date, £4·5 million in 1984-85. The programmes concerned are: urban programme, derelict land, housing corporation and sport.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had with building societies about the operation of the Housing Defects Act; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what undertakings he has received from building societies about the mortgageability of houses in categories named in the Housing Defects Act;

(3) what information he has as to those categories of housing which, prior to the passing of the Housing Defects Act, were difficult to mortgage on account of structural defects, real or potential, and which have become mortgageable since the passing of the Act.

Mr. Gow: Discussions with the National House Building Council and the Building Societies Association are continuing. I shall reply fully to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Local Government Capital Expenditure

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total of local authority capital expenditure, expressed in cost terms in each year since 1979, gross of sales of fixed assets.

Mr. Waldegrave: Total capital expenditure, gross of sales of fixed assets and including net lending (on a public expenditure survey basis) by English local authorities expressed in cost terms as an index (1978-79=100) (£3347 million) is as follows:

Year	*Index*
1978-79	100
1979-80	110
1980-81	96
1981-82	81
1982-83	90
*1983-84	91

* Provisional

For 1978-79 to 1982-83 the index is calculated from the figures published in table 2.18 of Cmnd. 9143-II with sales of fixed assets added back. For 1983-84 provisional estimates from local authorities are used. All figures are revalued using the GDP deflator.

Pumping Stations (Methane Gas)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how often regional water authorities conduct tests for methane gas leaks at pumping stations;

(2) how many tests for methane gas leaks have been carried out at pumping stations by regional water authorities in the last 12 months.

Mr. Gow: Detailed information on tests by water authorities for methane gas at water supply works is not available centrally. In accordance with advice given by the Health and Safety Executive, water supply undertakers are taking safety measures at their water works including appropriate tests for the presence of methane gas.

Asbestos

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the action taken by local authorities in South Yorkshire following the recent asbestos deposition.

Sir George Young: I am advised that the Sheffield city and Rotherham metropolitan borough councils have taken appropriate and effective action, and that the work of cleaning up is progressing smoothly.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide financial support to the local authorities concerned with the recent asbestos fall-out in South Yorkshire.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend will consider any representations that the authorities concerned may wish to make.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken in response to the recent fall-out of asbestos in parts of South Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The primary responsibility for taking action in this matter lies with the local environmental health departments; my Department has kept in touch with the authorities concerned.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the volume of asbestos which fell upon areas of South Yorkshire between 14 and 16 December.

Sir George Young: It is not possible to make an accurate estimate of the volume of asbestos which fell on these areas.

Smokeless Zones

Sir. John Page asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will urgently complete his consultations about the possible lifting of smokeless zone requirements in certain areas so that he can announce his decision before Christmas.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has aleady agreed to suspend smoke control orders temporarily in three areas where the local authorities concerned have formally requested it. The suspension orders will come into effect shortly. He is prepared to consider further requests in the light of evidence about the need for such action.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a breakdown of the estimated savings arising from the abolition of West Yorkshire metropolitan county council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir. George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 30 November at column 611.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to consult the Greater London council, the London boroughs or the local authority associations on his proposals to abolish the Greater London council's housing role, other than over the collective funding of voluntary bodies.

Sir George Young: Yes.

Housing Association Schemes (Finance)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his announcements of the financing arrangements for housing association schemes will include proposals for the funding of housing associations whose operations cover more than one London borough.

Sir George Young: Yes. It is normal for such associations seeking local authority funding to do so from the borough in which the scheme lies.

GLC Expenditure Target

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what the increase in the Greater London council's expenditure target was between 1984-85 and the provisional estimate for 1985-86 before any adjustments were made for changes to transport support grant and the setting up of London Regional Transport.

Mr. Waldegrave: £354·089 million.

Rate Equalisation Scheme

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to provide London ratepayers with information relating to an extended London rate equalisation scheme.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is for local authorities to inform ratepayers of the components of their rate demand.

Historic Buildings (Restoration)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been contributed by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for the restoration of historic buildings in London in each of the past five years.

Mr. Gow: In each of the last five years the total of grants offered for the repair of maintenance of buildings of outstanding historic or architectural interest in London is as follows. Only since 1 April 1984 has this been the responsibility of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission.

	£
1980-81	324,417
1981-82	419,640
1982-83	442,457
1983-84	429,896
1984*	543,761

* To date.

Rented and Sheltered Accommodation

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those measures taken by the Government since 1979 to encourage a greater availability of general accommodation for rent and sheltered accommodation in the private sector; and if he will estimate the increase in both.

Sir George Young: The Housing Act 1980 contained several provisions designed to stimulate the provision of private rented accommodation, including the introduction of shorthold and assured tenancies; a reduction from two to three years in the periods between reviews of fair rents and over which increases in such rents are phased; and simpler and quicker repossession procedures for resident landlords and for absent owner-occupiers letting their homes. My right hon. Friend is at presentconsidering what further steps might be taken to build on these initiatives.

The Government are supporting a wide range of private sector initiatives to encourage greater provision of elderly persons' accommodation, and has launched a film on "Housing the Elderly" to highlight forward thinking in both the private and public sectors.

No comprehensive information is available on recent changes in the supply of private rented accommodation either for general needs or for the elderly.

Listed Building Consent

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when was the last occasion on which he decided to call in an application for listed building consent which had been received at the west midlands regional office of his Department.

Mr. Macfarlane: 29 November 1984.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for listed building consent were received at the west midlands regional office of his Department during October; how many of these applications were still outstanding on 31 October and 30 November; and how many are still outstanding.

Mr. Macfarlane: The number of applications received during October was 27; four of these were outstanding on 31 October and none on 30 November.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for listed building consent received at the west midlands regional office of his Department were outstanding on 31 July; how many of these applications were still outstanding on 31 August, 30 September, 31 October and 30 November; and how many are still outstanding.

Mr. Macfarlane: The number of applications outstanding on 31 July was 28. Of those six and two remained outstanding on 31 August and 30 September respectively. One of these was outstanding on 31 October.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is now able to announce the date on which the consultative document on competitive tendering by local authorities is to be published.

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot yet announce a precise date for publication, but hope that it will be before the end of January.

Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of the rates forgone, plus the cost of infrastructure works of creating each new job in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone, excluding jobs in construction, jobs in the London Docklands Development Corporation's own offices, and jobs in Cannon Workshops.

Sir George Young: The London borough of Tower Hamlets and Newham have claimed the following amounts of rates forgone in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone:

	£
Newham	*208,738
Tower Hamlets	†4,556,053

*To 30 September 1983.
†To 30 September 1984.

By October of this year the corporation had carried out infrastructure and environmental works in the enterprise zone costing £21·543 million. Excluding jobs in construction, in LDDC's own offices, and in Cannon workshops, 732 jobs have been created. It is premature to make comparisons between the infrastructure works costs and the numbers of jobs created. The infrastructure works serve further sites now under development or in preparation.

The corporation estimate that by 1992 total expenditure in the enterprise zone will amount to £45 million. The resulting development capacity could produce 14,000 jobs at a cost per job of £3,215.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is considering legislation to grant national parks and local authorities the power immediately to stop development considered harmful to the environment in sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. Adequate powers already exist for the control of potentially harmful development in SSSIs.

Housing Investment Programme Allocations

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details of local authorities' housing investment programme allocations for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: Gross provision for local authorities' housing investment in England in 1985-86 is £2,324 million. This sum includes £31 million for the homes insulation scheme, including administrative costs.

The total available for housing investment programme allocations is £1,600 million. The initial HIP allocation total is £1,593 million, a reserve of £7 million having been established from which further homes insulation scheme allocations may be made in accordance with demand. Each local authority is today being informed of its own allocation. Copies of the letter to authorities and of the schedule of initial allocations have been placed in the Library and the Vote office. A note on the method by which those allocations were determined has also been placed in the Library.

Osborne House Convalescent Home

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the future management of the Osborne house convalescent home.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am glad to be able to announce that the Civil Service benevolent fund has agreed to enter into a contract to manage the home on my right hon. Friend's behalf, with effect from 1 July 1985. I am confident they will be able to maintain standards and to preserve the traditions of the home.

Grant Charges

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his proposals for safety-netting grant changes between 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The principles used in the construction of safety net multipliers were described in annex H to the Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1985-86, which was laid before the House on 11 December. Since then a technical error has been discovered in paragraph 6 of that annex. The error does not affect the statutory determinations of the multipliers or any of the calculations of grant or targets sent to local authorities. Nevertheless, for the removal of doubt, my right hon. Friend has today laid before the House the 1985-86 RSG report with a correction to the paragraph. The opportunity is also being taken to correct a printer's mistake. The text of the report is otherwise unchanged from the one published last week. A copy of the revised Report will be sent to all local authorities.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the report of the independent inquiry by Peat, Marwick and Mitchell into the competitive practices of the Ordnance Survey will be available to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *655*]: Its report has recently been received and is now being considered both by the director general of the Ordnance Survey and by myself.

The report follows the announcement in January of this year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that the annual trading accounts for the Ordnance Survey, including statements on revenue and expenditure by main product groups, would be published, and that the basis of these accounts would be independently reviewed by commercial auditors. This will help to ensure that there is no cross subsidisation of Ordnance Survey's commercial activities from its Exchequer Vote.

It is intended that an executive summary of the report will be published.

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what net profit has accrued to the Ordnance Survey from the sales of new atlases, town plans and guide books.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *655*]: Whilst recognising the need for a reasonable balance between adequate disclosure and commercial discretion in relation to Ordnance Survey trading activities, I believe that it would not be proper to disclose this commercially sensitive information.

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why the independent report into the competitive position of the Ordnance Survey joint publishing activities has been submitted to the Ordnance Survey management rather than to him direct.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *656*]: The report has been submitted to the director general, Ordnance Survey, and through him to me.

Pollution

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres or hectares of trees are affected by the new form of damage reported in the Government reply to the "Report on Acid Rain" from the Environment Committee, Cmnd. 9397, to have recently been observed in north and west Britain; which species are affected, and in what proportions: and when this new form of damage was *(a)* first detected and by whom, *(b)* first publicly recorded and *(c)* first known to the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *658*]: It is difficult to assess accurately the area affected by the new form of damage to trees which is referred to in the Government reply to the Environment Committee report. Significant damage has been observed in a few older plantations at high elevations in forests along the western seaboard of Britain from Cumbria to Sutherland; it affects only a very small percentage of those forests. The species affectd are Scots pine, Lodgepole pine, Sitka spruce, Norway spruce, Douglas fir and Grand fir. The relative incidence appears to be similar for all species. Damage to Scots pine, Lodgepole pine, Douglas fir and Grand fir was first reported by Forestry Commission staff in Scotland and first known to the Forestry Commission in the period April-June 1984. Apparently similar damage to Sitka spruce was reported from Cumbria by the Friends of the Earth (Scotland) on 12 June 1984; this was the first public record of damage.

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any evidence of tree damage associated with air pollution in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *658*]: While there are clearly effects on trees adjacent to major sources of pollution, there is no present evidence of pervasive damage to trees in Britain in recent years that can be ascribed to air pollution; the Forestry Commission maintains a close watch on the situation.

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in what ways the new form of damage to trees reported in the reply to the Environment Committee "Report on Acid Rain" (Cmnd. 9397) as occurring in north and west Britain resembles that associated with air pollution in Germany; and whether the damage can be explained by the action of pathogenes, fungi, bacteria, stress, drought, climate or other causes not associated with *(a)* acid deposition and *(b)* other pollution.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *658*]: The damage to spruce in Britain resembles that observed in Germany so far as the distribution of damaged shoots in the crowns of affected trees is concerned, but differs crucially in its occurrence at one time rather than over a number of years and in the absence of needle yellowing. The available evidence suggests that unusual climatic factors in the winter of 1983-84 were involved, but the Forestry Commission is still studying this phenomenon and it is too early to say whether the damage was caused by this or some other factor, or combination of factors.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Citizens Band Radio (Channel 9)

61. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to ensure that citizens band channel 9 is used solely as an emergency channel.

Mr. Butcher: Earlier this year the CB licence was amended to draw attention to the code of practice recommendation that channel 9 should be used for emergencies and assistance only. I am not convinced that any further measures at present are justified.

Civil Defence

62. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he hopes to have completed his studies into the role of industry in civil defence planning.

63. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to encourage industry to create an effective civil defence capability.

Mr. Trippier: I am hopeful that during the next year substantial progress will be made in assessing the essential requirements which industry could be called upon to supply for civil defence purposes, and industry's capability to meet them.

Industrial Assistance

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government financial assistance has been given to the steel industry in the north-east of England in the last 10 years to offset working losses.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No financial assistance has been given to the private sector steel industry in the north-east of England for the purpose of offsetting working losses. The finance provided to BSC goes towards the general needs of the corporation and is not allocated to specific purposes and areas. I am asking BSC to supply information about trading losses in recent years in the north-east and I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government financial assistance

has been given to the shipbuilding industry in the north-east of England in the last 10 years to offset working losses.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The principal component of Government financial assistance to the shipbuilding industry in the north-east over the last 10 years has been support since nationalisation for British Shipbuilders (BS). Such support is not allocated to specific areas of specific categories of cost. But in considering the external finance requirements of the industry, forecast cash flow which takes account of losses is an important factor. The published accounts of BS merchant shipbuilding subsidiaries in the north-east, recorded total trading losses in the period 1978-79 to 1983-84 of about £170 million, including future loss provisions and after crediting payments of intervention fund.

Regional Aid

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which service industries in particular will benefit from regional development allocations under his restructured regional aid policy.

Mr. Trippier: Under the new regional development grant scheme grant will be payable towards carrying out approved projects which involve the provision of new capital assets or the net creation of new jobs in development areas. One of the criteria which must be satisfied before a project can be approved is that it must relate wholly or mainly to qualifying activities.

The qualifying activities for the purposes of the new scheme are set out in the Regional Development Grant (Qualifying Activities) Order 1984 (SI 1846). All the previous qualifying activities remain qualifying, and a few activities have become qualifying as a result of the use of the 1980 rather than the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification. In broad terms the new qualifying activities in the service sector are:

- Computer Services.
- Technical Services.
- Management Consultants and market research and public relations consultants (including exhibition contracting and organising).
- Administrative Headquarters.
- Advertising (excluding Bill posting agencies and window dressers).
- Venture capital providers.
- Credit card operations where they are the sole or main activity at a location.
- Export Houses.
- Repair (except for repair of consumer goods and vehicles, and dry cleaning and allied services).
- Refurbishment of manufactured goods for resale or exchange.
- Value-Added Network Services.
- Cable Television.
- Provision of goods and services by mail order.
- Freight forwarders and packers.
- Football pools.
- Research and Development work in the industrial field carried out in specialised research establishments.

Regional selective assistance will continue to be available on a discretionary basis for service industry projects in assisted areas which meet the criteria for such assistance.

Within the above framework the degree to which particular service industries will benefit will depend on the projects which are put forward by applicants.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will discuss with the countries of the European Community raising the current job grant limit sum of £3,300 allocated towards each new post created under his restructured regional aid scheme.

Mr. Trippier: The limit is prescribed by the European Commission under the powers given to it by article 93(1) of the treaty. I believe that the new Commission will wish to give early consideration to this general subject. The United Kingdom will naturally play its full part in the discussion of any proposals that might emerge.

EC (Industrial Funding)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of funding has been devoted towards British industries from the European Community budget since 1979; and which industries have derived most benefit from it.

Mr. Trippier: Since 1979 the United Kingdom has been allocated £307·5 million for industrial projects from the quota section of the European regional development fund. A further £121 million has been allocated under the non-quota section of the fund to aid small firms in steel, shipbuilding and textile areas, and border areas in Northern Ireland. The fund is designed to correct regional imbalances rather than to aid particular industries, and it would not be possible to determine which sectors of industry have benefited without disproportionate cost. Aid from the European social fund is principally the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment but £7·1 million has been paid from the social fund in respect of grants under the in-plant training scheme introduced under section 7 of the Industry Act 1972 on 1 April 1980.

Company Law

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will consider amendment to companies' legislation to permit public companies with substantial numbers of shareholders to hold a series of general meetings in different parts of the United Kingdom, all to constitute one annual general meeting subject to cumulative voting.

Mr. Fletcher: The Companies Acts impose very few restrictions on the holding of company meetings and it is not clear that changes in the law are, at present, necessary. However, I am always ready to consider ways and means of encouraging and facilitating shareholder participation in company affairs.

Technology (Financial Support)

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received following his announcement of a freeze on financial support programmes for technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: As at 14 December 22 written representations have been received from individuals, firms or organisations, commenting on the announcement by my hon. Friend on 12 November that, pending the completion of a review of policy in support of industrial research and development, no new applications could be considered for certain categories of project assistance.

As my hon. Friend explained at the time, collaborative projects for applied or seedcorn research can still be considered. Help for civil aviation, aero engine and space projects outside the support for innovation programme is not affected nor are other measures such as the teaching company scheme and the arrangements to help firms obtain expert consultancy and advice.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will make a statement on the future of the loan guarantee scheme.

Mr. Trippier: I made an announcement on the future of the loan guarantee scheme on 17 December 1984.

Industrial Capacity

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on the current level of capacity utilisation in industry within the member states of the EEC and the EC as a whole;

(2) if he will make a statement on the level of productive potential in EEC member states and within the EEC as a whole.

Mr. Channon: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EC (Industry-Steel Council Meeting)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the European Community Industry-Steel Council of Ministers meeting held on 17 December.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The main issue at the Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, was the Commission's proposal to make certain amendments to the steel aids code, intended to help achieve the central objective of terminating aids to steelmakers by the end of 1985. although some progress was made, agreement was not reached and discussion will be continued at a further Council planned for January. The Council also considered proposals for certain technical amendments to the ECSC article 58 quota arrangements, and will pursue this issue, too, in January. The Commission reported on the market situation in ferrous scrap, and said that there were no grounds at present for export controls, but that if the volume of EC exports increased beyond the current level of 6 million tonnes, if prices increased further and if there was a reduction in supplies to the Community market, the Commission would submit to the Council proposals for export restrictions.

The Council also reviewed the progress made to date in the field of telecommunications, and endorsed broad objectives giving direction to future work; agreed to study further the question of Community tariffs on consumer electronics and semi-conductors; and resolved a number of technical issues on the proposed Regulation on non-energy raw materials exploration loans.

Insurance Contracts

Mr. Lyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will bring forward legislation to reform the law on non-disclosure and breach of warranty in relation to insurance contracts affecting private consumers.

Mr. Fletcher: I am embarking on discussions with the insurance industry to see whether changes to their statements of insurance practice can be made to deal with problems in those areas. I shall review whether legislation is appropriate and feasible in the light of whatever changes may be agreed. I shall report the Government's conclusion to the House.

Steel Industry (Joint Ventures)

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all the joint companies that have been established between private firms and the British Steel Corporation since May 1979 to the present date; if he will also give the total value of the British Steel Corporation assets concerned; and what amount the private sector paid for them.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *249*]: The joint companies formed between the British Steel Corporation and private firms since May 1979 and which are currently in existence are as follows:

Name of company	*Date of formation*
Teesside Slag Ltd.	October 1979
Firth Brown Fox Ltd.	October 1979
Allied Steel and Wire (Holdings) Ltd.	March 1981
Offshore Castings Ltd.	May 1981
Hobbs Cornelly Ltd.	March 1982
Catena Ltd.	April 1982
Sheffield Forgemasters (Holdings) plc	July 1982
British Bright Bar Ltd.	December 1982
Hadfields (Holdings) Ltd.	June 1983
Seamless Tubes Ltd.	December 1983
Clyde Shaw Ltd.	January 1984
Flixborough Wharf Ltd.	January 1984
Cold Drawn Tubes Ltd.	March 1984

Not all these joint companies involved the transfer of BSC assets, and in some cases the basis of the joint companies was a pooling of assets with another company rather than a purchase of BSC assets by a new joint company. The total value of BSC assets transferred to the above list was approximately £195 million. The terms of private sector involvement in these ventures are commercially confidential.

TRANSPORT

Roads (Public Inquiries)

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to modify the public inquiry procedure for major roads and motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment will be considering whether any changes should be made in the light of the Civil Engineering Economic Development Committee's report on pre-construction procedures for motorway and trunk road schemes, which they have just received.

Driving Tests

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current waiting time for a driving test

in Dundee; what are the comparable figures for each of the past three years; and what are the corresponding figures for Scotland.

Mrs. Chalker: The figures for an L driving test are:

	Dundee weeks	*Scotland weeks*
14 December 1984	16	14
16 December 1983	10	7
17 December 1982	4	7
18 December 1981	9	9

More examiners are being recruited for Scotland to bring down waiting periods.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current first-time percentage pass rate for each driving test centre in Scotland.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is not available. The pass rate for all candidates taking their test in the Scottish traffic area in 1983 was nearly 51 per cent. Nationally the figure was just over 49 per cent.

Bourton and Zeals Bypass

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce the date of the publication of draft order proposals for implementation of the Bourton and Zeals bypass.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am unable at this stage to give a firm date for publication of the draft orders, but if present progress is maintained I hope that this will be achieved during the latter part of next year.

Weighbridges

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what alternative facilities are available to serve drivers wishing to weigh their loads before leaving British ports, in the event of his Department's axle weighbridge facilities being closed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what hours his Department's axle weighbridges are open for use each day; and whether such facilities are open seven days a week.

Mrs. Chalker: In addition to public weighbridges and private weighbridges which haulage companies have installed for their own use, my Department is equipping its own axle weighbridges at ports with a driver self-weigh facility which is available at all times when the site is not being used for enforcement.

My Department's weighbridge check sites are used at varying times for enforcement checks by each of the three enforcement agencies concerned with overloading.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether his Department plans to install weighbridge facilities in those ports which do not currently possess them;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* those major ports which have his Department's axle weighbridge facilities and those which do not.

Mrs. Chalker: Dynamic axle weighbridges have been provided at the following ports:
Felixstowe
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Dover East
Dover West
Sheerness
Newhaven

My Department has proposals for providing further axle weighbridges at the following ports in consultation with the port authorities:
Hull
Immingham
Fishguard
Pembroke Dock
Ramsgate
Southampton
Heysham

East London Road Assessment

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport which Government policies are referred to in the statement in his Department's press notice No. 527 on the east London road assessment study to which the road study is to have regard.

Mrs. Chalker: As the Government's various White Papers, statements and legislation have all made clear, our overall aim is to cater for the movement of goods and people more cost-effectively within the resources available, having regard to environmental and other considerations.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange to publish all the responses he receives to the consultation on the east London road assessment study.

Mrs. Chalker: No. It will be for the individuals concerned to decide if they wish to publish their views.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define the phrase "essential lorry" as used in his Department's press notice No. 527 on the east London road assessment study.

Mrs. Chalker: Essential lorries are those which form part of the necessary commercial and industrial traffic.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define the word "corridor" as used in his Department's press notice No. 527 on the east London road assessment study.

Mrs. Chalker: As the press notice concerned makes clear, the word "corridor" means an area through which longer distance traffic movement in London takes place.

A7 (Improvement)

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether, following recent major improvements to that section of the A7 trunk route just north of the Scottish border, he will examine as a matter of urgency the need for an improvement scheme to that section of the route immediately south of the border.

Mrs. Chalker: Trunk routes in the area are constantly monitored. I have no current proposals for improvement of the A7 south of the border.

Manchester Airport

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the

representations he has received from individuals and organisations in the north-west region, advocating increased use of Manchester airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Railways (London)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a map of all railway lines in London, showing those in use for passenger and goods, passenger only, goods only, those serviceable but not used and those not serviceable but capable of being brought back into use.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. The hon. Member may wish to ask British Rail and London Regional Transport for information about lines of theirs which are of particular interest to him.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway line.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail has published a proposal to withdraw passenger services from this line. The proposal is being dealt with in accordance with the procedures laid down by Parliament. Objections from users will, therefore, be considered by the appropriate transport users consultative committees, which will report to my right hon. Friend on any hardship they consider withdrawal would cause. My right hon. Friend will then decide whether to give his consent to the proposal, having regard to all the relevant factors, including social and economic considerations.

Airport Investment

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is in a position to announce the capital expenditure allocations for local authority airport investment for 1985-86.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have decided to designate as projects of national and regional importance the following new airport investment schemes and to make the appropriate capital expenditure allocations for 1985-86.

Airport and Schemes
Blackpool
Modernisation of electrical ring main system
Bristol
Terminal improvements and extension
Apron extension
Improvements to drainage
New fuel form
Cardiff
Runway extension
Carlisle
Paved surfaces reconstruction
East Midlands
Airfield lighting substations
Terminal development Phase 10
Car park surfacing
Exeter
Extension of car park
Terminal building improvements
Humberside
Helicopter terminal
Liverpool
New friction course and lighting for runway
Luton
Runway safety area
Replacement foam tender
Newcastle
Resurfacing of paved areas
Distance from threshold indicator
Teeside
Resurfacing of taxiway

In addition, capital expenditure allocations will be made for continuing expenditure on the following schemes which were designated for 1984-85:

Airport and Schemes
Birmingham
Terminal development
Bournemouth
Terminal rebuilding
Air Navigation system replacement
Runway resurfacing
Cardiff
Motor transport depot completion
East Midlands
Radar replacement
Leeds/Bradford
Runway extension and terminal extension
Luton
Terminal building development
Manchester
Services to development areas
Adaptations to terminal
Aircraft stands
Airport link road contribution
Cargo centre
Newcastle
Terminal building extension
Norwich
New terminal

The total public expenditure provision for 1985-86 for local authority investment in airports will amount to £31 million.

Vehicle Testing

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish figures for each year since 1979 relating to (i) the number of Ministry of Transport tests carried out on cars, (ii) the number of cars which failed the Ministry of Transport test, (iii) the number of cars which have failed the Ministry of Transport test partly or wholly as a result of having illegal tyres and (iv) the number of persons prosecuted for being in possession of a car with illegal tyres.

Mrs. Chalker [*pursuant to her reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *182*]: The figures for MOT testing in (i) to (iii) of the following table are based on a 2 per cent. sample of all MOT tests. Details of prosecutions at (iv) are published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
(i) Number of cars (including 3-wheelers) tested	13,740,450	12,355,550	13,040,850	12,457,000	12,970,950
(ii) Number of cars that failed the test	5,200,750	5,099,330	5,028,950	4,628,950	4,869,500
(iii) Failure due partly or wholly to tyre defects	770,850	739,560	754,950	711,300	796,750
(iv) Number of persons successfully prosecuted	78,824	87,640	90,910	91,104	86,678

ENERGY

British National Oil Corporation

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will discontinue the practice of permitting the British National Oil Corporation to take oil in kind in a period of over supply.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I have powers, under licence model clauses, to require licensees to make deliveries of petroleum in place of royalties. My policy on the use of these powers is kept under review but presently remains as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) told the House on 30 June 1982, at column *306*. The BNOC acts as my agent in disposing of royalty oil taken in kind, and the proceeds thereof are remitted to me.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to wind up the British National Oil Corporation or to abolish mandatory participation rights.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 1 August to the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley), on 1 August, at column 295.

Chemical Industry

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is prepared to recommend any special arrangements for the chemical industry in its use of electricity to prevent migration of firms to France to take advantage of cheaper tariffs prevailing there.

Mr. Goodlad: No, not specifically for the chemical industry; but I would refer to the answer given to another question from my hon. Friend today on large industrial users of electricity.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the nuclear power stations under construction with expected capacities and dates of completion and those planned specifying the capacity envisaged.

Mr. Goodlad: One nuclear power station is currently under construction by the CEGB. This station, Heysham II, is an advanced gas cooled reactor, with two 660 megawatt reactors. It is expected to be completed during 1987-88. In addition, on 30 January 1981, the CEGB submitted an application to build a pressurised water reactor of 1110 megawatts capacity at Sizewell B. This application is currently the subject of a public inquiry. Details of the proposed station are given in the board's proof of evidence to the inquiry. Matters concerning power stations in Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Sizewell

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy, of the total anticipated cost of the projected Sizewell pressurised water reactor at £1,147 million, what value of order he estimates will be placed in the United Kingdom and allocated to contractors abroad, respectively.

Mr. Goodlad: The Central Electricity Generating Board expects that approximately 7 per cent. of the total cost of the Sizewell B project would be accounted for by contracts placed abroad. Of these contracts, about half of the value would be for plant and equipment, and the remainder for licence fees, software and other services.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what he assesses to be the value of uranium fuel used in Sizewell B.

Mr. Goodlad: Approximately 5,400 tonnes of uranium would be required to fuel the station over its expected lifetime. The value would depend on market prices in future years.

Oil Supplies

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take steps to reduce the amount of oil at the British National Oil Corporation's disposal during periods of over-supply.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: BNOC's contractual rights under the participation agreements do not entitle the corporation to vary its volumes at short notice. I expect the corporation at all times to exercise due commercial prudence in making commitments for the purchase of oil.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the total cost to the Exchequer of the Government's attempt to stabilise the oil market through British National Oil Corporation.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No estimate can be given on costs or benefits to the Exchequer because we do not know how the price, and therefore tax revenues on oil production, would have developed in the absence of action by BNOC in the interests of stabilisation in 1978-80, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he plans to make further provision by way of amendments of the Energy Act 1976 to secure oil supplies at all material times.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No.

Electricity Supplies (Costs)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he proposes to give further assistance to large industrial users of electricity by encouraging the Central Electricity Generating Board to make special purchases of coal dedicated to reducing the cost of electricity to such users.

Mr. Goodlad: I am concerned that British industry as a whole should be able to obtain the most favourable tariffs possible, taking account of costs and other constraints within which the electricity supply industry operates. Load management schemes introduced by the industry in recent years have contributed to making their industrial tariffs competitive with those in other EEC countries, with the exception of France, where generating costs are considerably lower. The Electricity Council is considering a number of proposals for the extension of those schemes, and financial allowance for them is incorporated in next year's external financing limit announced last month for the industry. I understand that the council is also examining with the CEGB the possibility referred to by the hon. Member.

NCB Enterprise Scheme

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Energy what criteria are used to determine whether a mining area is eligible for assistance from the National Coal Board enterprise scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: Allocation of the resources available to NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. is a matter for the new company. The National Coal Board has stated that the pupose of the company is to help create new business opportunities and provide alternative jobs in coal industry areas were unemployment is already substantial.

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the Barnsley metropolitan council area will qualify for assistance under the National Coal Board enterprise scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: Allocation of the resources available to NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. is a matter for the new company. I shall ask the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Coal-firing Scheme

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement upon the future of the coal-firing scheme.

Mr. Peter Walker: Regrettably, the current industrial dispute in the coal industry has, I believe temporarily, affected confidence in making investment in new coal-fired boilers and the amount of money committed in grants under the coal firing scheme has not yet reached the scheme's £75 million ceiling. My Department will therefore continue to consider applications for coal firing grants made after 31 December 1984. The existing ceiling however remains unchanged. Exchange risk cover will also continue to be available on ECSC loans for conversion to coal from gas or oil. The Commission of the European Communities is being informed of these changes.

Coal Industry

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much Government financial assistance has been given to the coal industry in the north-east of England in the last 10 years to offset working losses.

Mr. David Hunt: In the 10 years 1974-75 to 1983-84 collieries in the NCB's north-east area made an operating loss of some £258 million.

HOME DEPARTMENT

"Protect and Survive"

3. **Sir Anthony Kershaw** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish an updated version of "Protect and Survive".

Mr. Giles Shaw: Work is in hand on a replacement for "Protect and Survive". It cannot be finalised until the review of the blast and radiation effects of nuclear weapons is available. This should be early next year.

36. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will study the Swedish equivalent to the "Protect and Survive" booklet.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We keep closely in touch with civil defence in other European countries, including Sweden. My right hon. and learned Friend is aware of and has already examined this booklet.

49. **Mr. Hanley** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will include information on the properties of and protection against chemical weapons in any revised edition of "Protect and Survive".

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 20 November, at column 105, to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). It will be included when this work is complete.

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what aspects of civil defence he intends to include in his new version of "Protect and Survive".

Mr. Giles Shaw: It will cover those areas of civil defence which would be of direct relevance to the public including the action the public could take for protection against the effects of hostile attack and information on these effects and the complementary action that would be taken by local and central Government.

Entry Clearance Applications

14. **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many husbands of British citizens wives have been refused permission in 1984 to enter for purposes of settlement; and in how many of these cases the primary purpose rule was the main reason.

Mr. Waddington: In the first three quarters of 1984 in the Indian subcontinent, 190 husbands of British citizen wives were refused entry clearance for leave to enter the United Kingdom. One hundred and seventy husbands were refused solely because the primary purpose of the marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom, and a few were refused partly because of this reason. Some of these applications may be subsequently granted on appeal. Data on entry clearance applications outside the Indian subcontinent are not available.

18. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the proportion of husbands accepted for settlement from the Indian subcontinent in 1982; and what is the figure for the most recent 12 months.

Mr. Waddington: About two thirds of husbands who applied in the Indian subcontinent were granted entry clearance for leave to enter the United Kingdom in 1982, and a similar proportion were granted entry clearance in the 12 months up to September 1984.

Visitors (Entry Statistics)

15. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to visit the United Kingdom were refused entry certificates or admission at ports of entry; and what proportion was from the Indian subcontinent.

Mr. Waddington: In the first nine months of this year, 540 people were refused prior entry clearance as visitors in the Indian subcontinent. No figures are available for applications made in other countries.

In the same period, a total of 13,400 passengers were refused leave to enter the United Kingdom at ports, of

whom 21 per cent. were citizens of countries in the Indian subcontinent. Figures are not separately available for those seeking entry as visitors.

Privatisation (Departmental Savings)

16. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current estimated savings by his Department for 1984-85 as a result of privatisation schemes.

Mr. Mellor: It is estimated that about £1·9 million will be saved in 1984-85 as a result of contracting out to the private sector services previously provided by civil servants.

Coal Industry Dispute

17. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his most recent estimate of the cost of policing the mining dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: For the purpose of the Winter Supplementary Estimates we have estimated the additional expenditure up to the end of October at about £140 million.

25. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in view of the continuing coal industry dispute, what consultations he has had with chief constables in regard to contingency plans to maintain adequate police cover over the Christmas period; and what costs are involved.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no such consultations. The deployment of police officers is a matter for the chief officer of police concerned and I know that chief officers are well aware of the need to maintain adequate cover over the Christmas period.

33. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to discuss the use of Metropolitan police during the miners' strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no occasion to discuss this with the Commissioner.

40. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied with the protection available to those currently working in the mining industry.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that chief constables are fully aware of the problem of intimidation and the need to protect those currently at work in the coal industry.

Civil Defence

19. **Mr. Bevan** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to amend the Civil Defence Regulations 1983 to require local authorities to make further efforts to recruit and organise civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. My right hon. and learned Friend considers the present requirement in the 1983 regulations for local authorities to recruit, train, and exercise volunteers is sufficient.

20. **Mr. Martin Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lives he estimates could be saved by a limited civil defence evacuation policy.

60. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has considered the effect of a limited civil defence evacuation policy on casualty levels.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No dependable detailed estimates can be made. The number would vary substantially according, for example, to the ambitiousness of the scheme; how successful in the event planners proved to be at predicting targets; the number, size and long as well as short-term effects of the weapons used; and the nature of the reception arrangements for evacuees.

22. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy to plan for limited evacuation of the civil population from high-risk areas in wartime.

26. **Mr. Maginnis** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy to plan for limited evacuation of the civilian population from high-risk areas in wartime.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Members to the reply which my right hon. and learned Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and Dulwich (Mr. Bowden).

30. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review his Department's civil defence policy in the light of recent evidence concerning the possible climatic effects of nuclear explosions.

37. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government intend to publish their investigations into the nuclear winter findings.

42. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to publish the findings of the Government's investigations into the possibilities of nuclear winter and its effects following a nuclear exchange.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The evidence referred to concerns an unvalidated hypothesis known as the "nuclear winter" which is still the subject of research in the United States and elsewhere. This work is being monitored closely by the Government. We will review policy as appropriate when the findings are known.

44. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to implement the recommendations made to him by Sir Leslie Mavor regarding the role of local authorities on the organising of civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Sir Leslie Mavor's recommendations on organisation form the basis for the guidance to local authorities in Home Office circular No. ES 2/1981 and the draft consolidated circular, both of which are in the Library of the House.

47. **Mr. Clay** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the basis for the Government's assessment that the most likely threat of attack is from conventional strikes as stated in his Department's circular ES1/1984 on planning assumptions.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The basis is the present NATO assessments as to the likely course of any future war in Europe.

56. **Dr. Blackburn** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will support a standard recommended organisation for local authority civil defence volunteers.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn).

58. **Mr. Aspinwall** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance the principal of the Civil Defence college, Easingwold, will receive in carrying out his parallel role of co-ordinator of voluntary effort in civil defence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The co-ordinator will have available the resources of the Civil Defence college and the support of the recently appointed Civil Defence Adviser. He will also be assisted by the recommendations of the working party on the standardisation of volunteer training, on which local authorities are represented.

59. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he consults the Society of Industrial Emergency Services Officers on measures to improve the civil defence capability of industry.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. Ensuring that the civil defence capability of industry is improved is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary addressed the annual general meeting of the Society on 28 November 1984, when he was able to reaffirm the Government's commitment to improving the state of civil defence preparedness in all areas of our national life.

North London Polytechnic

21. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost of policing the North London polytechnic in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that very little overtime has been incurred in the policing of the disorders at the polytechnic. The additional cost to public funds is therefore minimal.

Special Entry Vouchers

23. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in India have applied for special vouchers to enter the United Kingdom; and what are the delays in granting such vouchers.

Mr. Waddington: As at 31 October 1984, the total number of applications for special vouchers made in India since the introduction of the scheme in 1968 was 13,800. Some cases are dealt with urgently on compassionate grounds, but the average time for which persons offered vouchers at the end of October 1984 in India had waited was seven years 10 months. Waiting times for new applicants are not forecast because they may be affected substantially by unforeseen developments.

Naturalisation

24. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long applications for naturalisation from the London area take to be processed.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested is not available. No record of applicants according to place of residence is kept.

41. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for naturalisation have been refused in each of the last five years.

Mr. Waddington: The figures are as follows:

Naturalisation

Year	*No. of applications refused*
1979	556
1980	1,119
1981	895
1982	1,121
1983	819

Sunday Trading

27. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the Auld committee on Sunday trading.

Mr. Lyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement on the report of the Auld committee on Sunday trading.

39. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to introduce legislation to implement the proposals of the Auld report on Sunday trading.

45. **Mr. Montgomery** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a statement on the report of the Auld committee on Sunday trading.

48. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is now in a position to make a statement about the repeal of the Shops Act.

Mr. Mellor: As my right hon. and learned Friend informed the House in answer to questions on 22 November at columns 392-93, he hopes to make a statement to the House in the early part of next year.

43. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has now received from the public and from interested parties such as trade associations for and against Sunday opening of shops following publication of the Auld committee report.

Mr. Mellor: Following the publication of the Auld committee report on Sunday trading we have received four letters from retailers, one from a trade association, and four from the public favouring Sunday opening. We have also received 113 from members of the public and one letter from a trade association against Sunday opening.

Police Constables (Training)

28. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial provision has been made for the training of police constables in each of the years 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The costs of training vary from force to force, and information on the total cost is not collected centrally. Hoever, the costs of the six Home Ofice district training centres, which provide initial training courses for recruits to provincial police forces, totalled £9,974,727 in 1982-83; £10,779,490 in 1983-84; expenditure is estimated at £10,540,000 for 1984-85.

Drugs (Unlawful Supplies)

29. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those convicted for the unlawful supply of drugs received custodial sentences in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The proportions given custodial sentences, including suspended sentences, in the United Kingdom for the unlawful supply of controlled drugs were as follows:

	Per cent.
1979	51
1980	53
1981	51
1982	54
1983	57

Coke and Iron Ore Lorries (Inquiry)

31. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the result of the inquiry regarding the convoys of lorries carrying coke and iron ore using the M4 between Port Talbot and Llanwern; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am not aware of any such inquiry.

Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man

32 **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he is currently considering in relation to the constitutional position of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man in relation to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None.

Concessionary Television Licences

34. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to review the present system of concessionary television licences.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are constantly looking to see if there are ways in which the concessionary licensing arrangements can be improved.

Tamils

35. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Tamils have benefited from the moratorium on removal from the United Kingdom to Sri Lanka.

Mr. Waddington: Since the end of April 1984 no Sri Lankan Tamil who has expressed a fear of return to Sri Lanka has been deported or removed. In about 85 cases deportation or removal action has been suspended. In about 300 other cases applications for asylum are still under consideration.

Air Weapons

38. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to repeat the media campaign conducted in 1983 warning against the misuse of air weapons.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Not at present, but my right hon. and learned Friend will consider the position again when the statistics on air weapon offences committed during and after the campaign become available.

Obscene Video Films

46. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been for offences relating to obscene video films in each quarter of the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The records available centrally do not distinguish separately offences involving video films. Figures, which may be incomplete, for offences of possession of obscene material, and so on, are published annually under offence classification 86 in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" —in vol. 1, table S1.1(A) for magistrates' courts and vol. 2, table 2.1(A) for the Crown court.

Burglary

50. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is satisfied that sufficient police manpower is devoted to the prevention and detection of burglary in London.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The prevention and detection of burglary is a central feature of the strategy of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, which has our full support. The deployment of the available manpower for particular purposes is a matter for the Commissioner.

53. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to seek to improve the clear-up rate for burglaries *(a)* in the Metropolitan police area generally and *(b)* in 'J' Division specifically.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, (Mr. Dobson) on 28 November, at column 493. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he has introduced a number of initiatives, all of which have been adopted in 'J' district, to further police effectiveness by focussing investigation of burglary on those cases most amenable to detection: these include the operation since 1982 of units at area level specially trained to deal with certain types of burglary such as those involving bogus officials; the introduction in 1983 of burglary case screening; and the establishment earlier this year of local units to collate forensic and other information to identify related offences.

Fines (Non-payment)

51. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present number of people in prison in England and Wales for the non-payment of fines.

Mr. Mellor: About 800 fine defaulters were in prison department establishments in England and Wales on 31 October 1984, the latest date for which information is available. This figure includes those in default of payment of compensation orders and costs.

Car Radios

52. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to introduce licence fees for car radios.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) on 13 November, at column 204.

India (Quota Vouchers)

54. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present waiting time for interview for applicants for quota vouchers in India.

Mr. Waddington: Waiting times for new applicants are not forecast, because they may be affected substantially by unforseen development. However, apart from cases dealt with urgently on compassionate grounds, persons offered vouchers in India at the end of October 1984 had waited seven years 10 months in the queue.

Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976

55. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his review of the monetary limits specified in section 11 of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to complete his review very shortly.

Drinking and Driving

57. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department is giving police forces regarding drinking and driving over the Christmas and holiday period.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No special advice is necessary. Arrangements for dealing with drink-drive offences over the holiday period are the responsibility of chief officers of police. National publicity designed to discourage drinking and driving over the period is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Custodial Remand (Psychiatric Reports)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people in the last year for which figures are available were remanded in custody for psychiatric reports; and what is the number so far in 1984;

(2) what is the average time taken to complete a psychiatric report on a remanded prisoner;

(3) what is the number of persons currently on remand in custody for psychiatric report.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not recorded centrally. Figures are available for the number of psychiatric reports prepared annually on prisoners remanded in custody for medical assessment, which would not necessarily correspond to the number of persons so remanded. There were 8,193 such reports prepared in 1983; figures for the current reporting period (which will extend to March 1985) are not yet available.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now take steps to withdraw plastic baton rounds from all police forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 7 December at columns 306-7.

Longmoor Base (Police Operation)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now received reports from the chief constable of Hampshire police concerning the police operation in the area of Longmoor base, Hampshire, between Thursday 15 November and Tuesday 20 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This reply also includes information pursuant to my reply on 29 November, at column 546.

My right hon. and learned Friend has now received and considered a report from the chief constable. The chief constable reports that Mrs. Badcock and her daughter were arrested by soldiers on the evening of 16 November, on military land near Longmoor camp, for trespassing on military land. At the time of their arrest Mrs. Badcock and her daughter were some distance from the military holding areas which were being used for handling people arrested for intruding on military land. Police officers at the scene agreed to transport Mrs. Badcock and her daughter to the holding area in their vehicle because of the distance involved and, on arrival at the holding area, handed them over to the military to be processed. Later, they were handed over to the police and were removed from the military land and released without charge.

Police officers were not guarding Longmoor base.

Winson Green Prison

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, *Official Report*, 27 November, column *421*, whether any letters from these three prisoners have been delayed by the governor of Winson Green prison or his staff at any time.

Mr. Mellor: The reading and examination of prisoners' correspondence under the prison rules naturally imposes some delay. If letters are written in a foreign language it may also be necessary to arrange for their translation before prison staff examine them.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all inmates at Winson Green prison have been informed that they can see the dentist who attends twice weekly and can ask for a routine dental examination.

Mr. Mellor: No. All inmates are informed at their reception boards that if they have any medical problems they should report sick to their landing officer.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many days the governor of Winson Green prison has been absent from the prison during 1984.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Kendrick, the governor of Winson Green prison, Birmingham, has been absent from the prison on 199 days during 1984.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand were segregated from other prisoners or put in solitary confinement at Winson Green prison during November; and whether there is any reference to his noble Friend, Lord Elton, in any records concerning their segregation or solitary confinement.

Mr. Mellor: The information readily available indicates that a total of 13 unsentenced prisoners were segregated at Birmingham prison during the month of November under prison rule 43 for their own protection and a total of 10 unsentenced prisoners were segregated under the same rule in the interests of good order and discipline. My noble Friend will write to the hon. Member with the further information he requested as soon as possible.

Prison Visits

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many queries or requests for advice were received by his Department about the administration of the assisted prison visits scheme during September; and from whom.

Mr. Mellor: Two in writing: one from a local DHSS office and the other from a member of the public. No record is kept of telephone inquiries.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the assisted prison visits scheme during the financial year 1983-84.

Mr. Mellor: Payments to claimants under this scheme are made by the Department of Health and Social Security, which is then reimbursed by the Home Office. The total paid by the Home Office under the scheme in the financial year 1983-84 was £637,793.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the definition of close relative for the assisted prison visits scheme.

Mr. Mellor: There is no statutory definition, but under this scheme the following may be regarded as close relatives of the prisoner to be visited: wife, husband, parents, children, step-parents, step-children, brothers, sisters, step-brothers, step-sisters and a common-law spouse where the couple have been living together as man and wife for a substantial period or where they have a child.

Mr. Mohammed Siddique

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State *Official Report*, 3 December, column 2, when his noble Friend will write to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, about the refusal of prison officers at Winson Green prison to allow an unconvicted prisoner on remand to wear his own shirt during a period of relaxation outside his prison cell;

(2) pursuant to the answer of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, *Official Report*, 29 November, column 545, when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend is writing to the hon. Member today.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Council of Ministers

Mrs. Rumbold asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Rifkind: The usual written forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. At present four meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for January.

The Agriculture Council is expected to meet on 14-15 January to consider the reform of the wine regime, which includes structural measures for Greece in the light of the conclusions reached at the Dublin European Council; beef imports from third countries under GATT; and the administration of the milk supplementary levy. Ministers may also consider agricultural structures, including aids for investment in agricultural holdings, measures for forestry and the protection of the environment.

The Fisheries Council is due to meet on 22 January to consider arrangements with Norway for the allocation of North sea herring; member states' quotas in Greenland waters for 1985; trilateral management with Norway and Sweden of joint stocks in the Skagerrak and Kattegat and, possibly, relations with Mauritania and Madagascar.

The Foreign Affairs Council is due to meet on 28-29 January to prepare the Community position for negotiations with Spain and Portugal. It will also discuss the draft new own resources decision.

There is to be an Industry Council towards the end of January to consider the Community's steel aids code and, possibly, state aids to industry.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from, and what discussions he has initiated with, any United Kingdom entity or mining company about seabed mining in connection with the United Nations convention on the law of the sea.

Mr. Rifkind: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has kept in close touch with the United Kingdom entities which have interests in deep seabed mining. So has the Department of Trade and Industry. We know of no potential United Kingdom operator who would wish to operate under the deep seabed mining regime presently proposed in the convention.

Hong Kong

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to keep the House of Commons informed on a continuous basis on the implementation of the agreement between the United Kingdom and China on the future of Hong Kong, in a manner which enables right hon. and hon. Members to monitor its progress.

Mr. Luce: As I made clear to the House during the debate on Hong Kong on 5 December, we are conscious of the importance of keeping Parliament regularly informed over the implementation of the agreement on Hong Kong's future. I have no doubt that Parliament will maintain the interest in and commitment to Hong Kong that it has already clearly demonstrated.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the number of *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* young persons and *(d)* juveniles in prison in Hong Kong at the latest available date;

(2) what is the longest period of time served in custody on remand by a person currently remanded in prison in Hong Kong;

(3) what is the number of *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* young persons and *(d)* juveniles on remand in custody in Hong Kong at the latest available date;

(4) what is the number of mentally-disordered persons in prison in Hong Kong *(a)* on remand and *(b)* sentenced;

(5) if he is satisfied with conditions in penal establishments in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The questions that the hon. Member has asked necessitate consultation with the Hong Kong Government and cannot be answered in the time available. A full reply will be published in the *Official Report* as soon as possible.

Namibia

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will review their policy with regard to the linkage of Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola and a settlement in Namibia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Cuban withdrawal was never part of Security Council resolution 435, nor do we accept that it should be a precondition for a settlement. But satisfactory arrangements for Cuban withdrawal would be helpful if a settlement is to be reached. We also believe that Cuban withdrawal, together with South African withdrawal from Namibia, will contribute to peace in the region. We therefore welcome current negotiations on this issue.

South Africa

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts have been made by Her Majesty's Government with African Commonwealth countries in support of Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Republic of South Africa.

Mr. Rifkind: There are frequent discussions with African and other Commonwealth countries about southern African problems, particularly South Africa and Namibia. Our firm belief that we can best assist the resolution of these problems by contact and dialogue is well understood.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the ambassador of the Republic of South Africa; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind; The South African ambassador called on my right hon. and learned Friend on 21 September, when he discussed bilateral questions, including the situation created by the presence of the six men who had sought refuge in our Durban consulate. The ambassador has subsequently called on other Ministers and senior officials.

Southern Africa

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government propose making any changes in their policy in the light of recent peace initiatives in southern Africa including the Nkomati accord, the Lusaka agreement, the Pretoria declaration and continuing Namibian negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: We have welcomed the Nkomati accord, the Lusaka agreement and other recent initiatives in southern Africa which we hope will improve the prospects for peace and stability. We encourage contact and dialogue between the countries of southern Africa and, with other Western countries, shall continue to work for the peaceful resolution of the region's problems through patient diplomacy.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Student Travel

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated saving on student travel as a result of new student travel regulations in Northern Ireland in the current academic year.

Mr. Scott: It is not yet possible to quantify actual savings, but it is estimated that they will be in the order of £150,000 to £200,000.

Secondary Schools

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if St. Columba's secondary maintained school in Portaferry is in receipt of additional scale score points in connection with the salaries being offered to teachers;

(2) which secondary schools in Northern Ireland have been granted additional scale score points in connection with the salaries being offered to teachers.

Mr. Scott: Education and library boards are empowered to designate schools of exceptional difficulty, to which additional scale score points may be granted; St. Columba's secondary school, Portaferry, has been granted additional scale score points, as have the following secondary schools:

Belfast board
Kelvin Secondary
Mount Collyer
Graymount

Ashfield Girls'
Ashfield Boys'
Model Girls'
Model Boys'
Orangefield Boys'
Dunlambert Boys'
Larkfield Secondary
Orangefield Girls'
Somerdale Boys'
Everton Girls'
Deramore
St. Partrick's Secondary
St. Gabriel's Secondary
St. Thomas' Secondary
St. Louise's Comprehensive
St. Monica's High
Little Flower Girls' Secondary
Our Lady of Mercy
St. Rose's Secondary
Christian Brothers (Glen Road)
St. Peter's Secondary
St. Augustine's High
St. Genevive's High
Cross and Passion High
St. Gemma's Secondary
St. Paul's Secondary
Christian Brothers (Gort Na Mona)
La Salle Boys'

Western board
Castlederg Secondary
Faughan Valley High
Omagh Secondary
Limavady High
St. Colman's High, Strabane
St. Mary's High, Limavady
St. Patrick's, Omagh
St. Mary's, Creggan
Our Lady of Mercy, Strabane
St. Fancheas', Enniskillen
St. Joseph's Boys', Enniskillen
St. Mary's, Irvinestown
St. Patrick's and St. Brigid's, Claudy
St. Brigid's Girls, Omagh
St. Joseph's Creggan
Dean Brian Maguire
St. Patrick's High, Dungiven
St. John's Dromore
St. Brecan's, Londonderry
St. Peter's High, Londonderry
St. Cecilias, Londonderry

North-Eastern board
Garvagh
Magherafelt
Coleraine Girls'
Coleraine Boys'
Maghera
Carrickfergus
Ballymena Boys'
Ballymena Girls'
Hopefield
Ballycastle High
Ballymoney
Cullybackey
Rathcoole
Dunclug
St. Aloysius', Cushendall
St. Comgall's, Larne
St. Olcan's, Randalstown
Our Lady of Lourdes, Ballymoney
St. Patrick's, Ballymena
St. Joseph's, Coleraine
St. Columb's, Draperstown
St. Mary's, Portglenone
St. Paul's, Kilrea
St. Pius X, Magherafelt
St. Patrick's, High Maghera
Stella Maris, Rathcoole

South-Eastern board
St. Mary's Girls', Downpatrick
St. Colmcille's, Downpatrick
St. Colman's Ballynahinch
St. Malachy's Castlewellan
De La Salle, Downpatrick

Southern board
Clounagh Junior High
Killicomaine Junior High
Fivemiletown High
Armagh Secondary
Aughnacloy Secondary
Brounlow High
Newry High
St. Joseph's Bodys', Newry
St. Columban's High, Kilkeel
St. Paul's, Bessbrook
St. Brigid's Boys', Armagh
St. Joseph's High, Crossmaglen
St. Patrick's High, Cookstown
St. Brigid's High, Portadown
St. Mary's Junior High, Lurgan
St. Patrick's High, Banbridge
St. Paul's Junior High, Lurgan
St. Mary's Girls', Newry
St. Patrick's Girls', Dungannon
St. Mark's, Warrenpoint
Our Lady's High, Cookstown
St. Malachy's High, Portadown
St. Ciaran's Ballygawley
St. Patrick's High, Keady
St. Joseph's High, Coalisland
Lismore Comprehensive
St. Patrick's Boys', Dungannon
St. Catherine's College, Armagh

Student Grants

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Government intend to extend the proposals to change the student award regulations to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: I am currently considering the implications for Northern Ireland students of the proposed changes in student award regulations for England and Wales.

Fair Employment Agency

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of individual discrimination have been found by the Fair Employment Agency in each year since its creation; and how many of these were against *(a)* Roman Catholics and *(b)* Protestants.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of findings of unlawful discrimination*	*Number of findings of discrimination against Catholics*	*Number of findings of discrimination against Protestants*
1 September 1976—31 March 1978	1	1	—
1 April 1978—31 March 1979	4	3	1
1 April 1979—31 March 1980	3	3	—

Year	Number of findings of unlawful discrimination	Number of findings of discrimination against Catholics	Number of findings of discrimination against Protestants
1 April 1980—31 March 1981	2	2	—
1 April 1981—31 March 1982	4	2	2
1 April 1982—31 March 1983	4	4	—
1 April 1983—31 March 1984	7	5	2
1 April 1984—3 December 1984	5	5	—
	30	25	5

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints about discrimination have been lodged with the Fair Employment Agency in each year since its creation.

Dr. Boyson: The information is as follows:

Year	Number of complaints registered
1 September 1976—31 March 1978	81
1 April 1978—31 March 1979	39
1 April 1979—31 March 1980	42
1 April 1980—31 March 1981	49
1 April 1981—31 March 1982	50
1 April 1982—31 March 1983	33
1 April 1983—31 March 1984	71
1 April 1984—3 December 1984	52
	*417

* Investigations in respect of 77 complaints remain to be completed.

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cross-border terrorist incidents have occurred between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in each of the last five years.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible to say with any accuracy how many terrorist incidents may have involved activity across the border with the Irish Republic.

Trade Exhibition

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for an exhibition about Northern Ireland trade to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Dr. Boyson: A provisional booking for a Northern Ireland exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall of the House has been made for the week commencing Monday 28 January 1985. Special emphasis will be placed on the promotion of Trade and Industry.

Mrs. Norah McCabe

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now set up an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. Norah McCabe on 9 July 1981.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 December 1984, c. *298*]: Mrs. McCabe's tragic death in 1981 has been fully investigated by the police and all the papers and relevant evidence were submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who directed that none of the officers involved should be prosecuted. Disciplinary proceedings have been considered and there has also been a coroner's inquest. I have considered carefully whether there are any issues arising from this particular case which should be examined in a further inquiry but have concluded that any such further examination would serve no useful purpose. I am concerned that plastic baton rounds should be subject to the closest control. I have reviewed the measures in force for their use. I will continue to receive reports describing the circumstances in which every round was fired. I am satisfied that the security forces are subject to strict regulations for the use of this weapon.

Young Help Scheme

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Government feel it is acceptable or proper for areas of work to be undertaken solely by persons on the young help scheme rather than by permanent staff with the assistance of young helpers.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *63*]: There is no requirement that volunteers under the young help scheme should undertake work only in situations where they are assisting permanent staff. It is of course expected that the organisation making use of the volunteer's services should provide suitable guidance on the duties to be undertaken.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the number of salmon which were taken by anglers in each stretch of the River Bush in each year since 1973 to the latest available date by *(a)* fly, *(b)* prawn, *(c)* worm and *(d)* spinning.

Dr. Boyson [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *209*] : I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 21 November 1984, at column 206. Information of catches by specific methods of angling is not available.

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many salmon and grilse were taken by the fish trap on the River Bush at Bushmills in each year since 1973 for stripping; how many salmon parr were produced from those fish in each year; where they were used for restocking; how many salmon redds were counted in the Bush system in each of those years; and what was the estimated production of parr from those redds.

Dr. Boyson [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *209*]: The following table indicates the numbers of adult salmon retained for stripping at Bushmills since 1973. The progeny of these adult fish is stocked as ova, fry, or as parr on one occasion in the case of the river Roe. Otherwise they are retained until the adult stage is reached. The smolt and ova production figures are presented in the table.

Among the locations which have been restocked with ova from this production are the rivers Bush, Margy, Shimna, Rooghan and the Roe and various other rivers throughout Ireland. One million fry have been stocked into the river Bush during 1982 and 1983 and 40,000 parr were restocked into the river Roe in 1983.

Year	*Number of salmon and grilse taken for stripping*	*Smolts reared and released at Bushmills*	*Number of ova produced for restocking*	*Number of redds counted in Bush system*	*Estimated smolt production from redds*
1973	710	41,845	260,000	—	18,784
1974	1,413	—	805,000	280	21,160
1975	1,539	14,213	1,017,000	389	21,173
1976	1,282	7,122	925,000	356	35,746
1977	863	10,855	50,000	418	22,457
1978	612	2,661	30,000	345	12,665
1979	568	1,122	14,000	201	12,279
1980	975	4,050	717,000	106	13,594
1981	245	1,434	220,000	163	32,750
1982	620	Not yet available	292,000	170	Not yet available
1983	423	Not yet available	140,000	*	—

* Weather condition prevented count.
Data for 1984 are not yet available.

Roads

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what proportion of urban roads in the Province are lit; and by what form of electric lighting;

(2) what proportion of group A roads in Northern Ireland are lit; and by what form of electric lighting.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *213*]: It is estimated that over 90 per cent. of urban roads are lit.

The classification "Group A" is not employed in relation to roads in Northern Ireland; of the class I category roads, it is estimated that 20 per cent. are lit.

High pressure sodium, low pressure sodium, high pressure mercury and fluorescent lanterns are used.

Irish Language

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to applying in Northern Ireland the principles set out in the resolutions and reports adopted by the European Parliament on the rights of people respecting minority languages and cultures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *214*]: Many of these principles are reflected in the Government's policies on education and on support for cultural activities.

WALES

Council House Sales

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing for Wales the gross receipts from council house sales under the right-to-buy legislation for 1979-80 to the latest available date.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The following table gives total receipts from council house sales (including new towns), net of associated mortgages. Receipts from sales under the right-to-buy legislation are not separately available.

Year	*£ million*
1979-80	3·8
1980-81	8·3
1981-82	44·8
1982-83	63·5
*1983-84	41·8

*Provisional outturn.

West Glamorgan (Emigration)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the sources that his Department used to make the assumption that the net outward migration for the county of West Glamorgan will be 1,000 persons per annum between 1987 and 1996.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Migration assumptions used in the population projections prepared by my Department are based on:

i. statistics of re-registrations notified to the National Health Service central register;
ii. statistics of international migration recorded by the international passenger survey, and
iii. discussions with the representative of the county planning officer of West Glamorgan.

Town and Country Planning Applications

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for the last five years for which figures are available the number of inquiries under town and country planning legislation in which the inspector has reported to him the result of town and country planning applications within *(a)* three days, *(b)* seven days, *(c)* 14 days and *(d)* 28 days of the date of the inquiry.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: This information is not recorded centrally. However, it is estimated that the time taken by inspectors to submit recommendations following inquiries on the complex planning cases to be determined by my right hon. Friend is generally more than 28 days.

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give, for each of the last five years for which statistics are available, the percentage of inquiries under town and country planning legislation in which the inspector has reported to him the inspector's decision before his full report is available.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: This information is not recorded centrally, but inspector's recommendations on planning cases to be determined by my right hon. Friend are generally conveyed only in their formal inquiry reports.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jurors (Oath)

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Attorney-General if the Government have any plans to change the oath required to be taken by those engaged in juries in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has no plans to alter the form of this oath.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Providenciales Airport

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) why the new international airport at Providenciales has been closed for resurfacing of the runway; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many aircraft movements have occurred at Providenciales airport since it was opened;

(3) if he will conduct an inquiry as to whether any person or firm was guilty of negligence in the design, planning and construction of the runway at Providenciales airport;

(4) if he will institute an inquiry to establish the cause of the runway at Providenciales airport requiring resurfacing and to establish liability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: An examination of the runway by an independent expert consulting engineer was commissioned by the Overseas Development Administration on behalf of the Turks and Caicos Islands Government in September 1984.

Cracks in the surface were found to be not structurally serious and not untypical of constructions to the pavement design used in this case. Performance was found to be normal for this type of construction. The application of a second sand seal was recommended as a form of maintenance to prevent any worsening of the cracks and to improve the texture of the surface. The airport has been closed to scheduled jet services from 29 November while this work is in progress. It is expected to re-open on 21 December. The airport has remained open throughout this period to local flights. There have been 18,540 aircraft movements between 1 August 1982, when the airport was first commissioned, and 30 November 1984.

Southern Africa

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether development projects in southern African countries will be affected by any changes made as a result of the recently revised aid budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The aid budget remains as projected. We shall continue our projects in these countries as planned.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the nature of existing United Kingdom development and technical aid projects in southern Africa.

Mr. Raison: Our aid to countries in southern Africa is increasingly given in the form of technical co-operation and help to buy essential spares, raw materials and other maintenance goods, as well as for schemes in their public investment programmes. More details of our aid in 1983 are given on pages 8-15 and 72-84 of my Administration's annual report, of which I am sending my hon. Friend a copy.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will review their participation in development projects in southern African countries and in Mozambique in particular.

Mr. Raison: We regularly monitor the progress of the projects in which we participate in these countries.

Population (World Bank Report)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken on the recommendations of the 1984 report of the World Bank on population.

Mr. Raison: The main conclusions of the World Development report 1984 are consistent with the view of successive British Governments that population programmes are an important element in the development process.

The report calls for substantial increase in population spending in order to reduce global fertility rates. We have recognised the needs in this sector and announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, we intend to increase our contributions to multilateral population organisations by £1·45 million in 1985.

World Bank

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how often he or any other Ministers in his Department have met the executive director of the World Bank appointed by the United Kingdom to discuss the policies or reports of the World Bank.

Mr. Raison: I have met the United Kingdom executive director on two occasions during the past year. The Government's instructions are normally communicated to the executive director by letter and telegram, and not in the course of personal meetings.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Assault)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many cases have been brought to his attention during the last 12 months involving the suspension of secondary school pupils for assault or grievous bodily harm on members of teaching staff.

Mr. Dunn: None formally.

Leigh Road School, Saltley

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received all the information which he needed from the city of Birmingham council to take a decision on the proposed school at Leigh road, Saltley.

Mr. Dunn: The authority has provided information over a period of time in response to various requests from the Department; the final item was received on 3 December 1984. My right hon. Friend approved the proposals on 19 December 1984.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department issues any advice or guidelines to local education authorities concerning drug abuse by (i) pupils and (ii) teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department issued general guidance on dealing with drug misuse, among other matters, in its 1977 publication, "Health Education in Schools". This included advice on the role of the teacher. Further advice was given this year in the Home Office publication "Prevention" to which Her Majesty's Inspectorate contributed.

Department of Education and and Science Ministers and officials are playing a full part in the interdepartmental group on the misuse of drugs and in that context we are considering urgently what further advice should be given to the education system. A number of possibilities are being studied.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Health Authorities (Resources)

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how he proposes to distribute resources to health authorities in 1985-86.

Mr. Fowler: I am today informing regional health authorities how the extra cash to be provided for the Health Service in England next year is to be shared out. Nationally, the budget for health authorities will be 5·5 per cent. higher in 1985-86, but the increase for individual regions will vary because we are continuing the policy of redistributing resources between different parts of the country.

As a result, I have been able to give bigger revenue increases to regions which are relatively deprived or which have rapidly growing populations. These increases range up to almost 7 per cent. Yet the relatively well-funded Thames regions will still receive increases of 4·2 to 4·4 per cent. In addition, all regions will benefit from their programmes of cost-improvement and rationalisation. These programmes are achieving substantial benefits in the current year and we will be expecting the new general managers to extend and develop them rigorously next year. As a result health authorities should be able to develop services faster than the cash growth figures imply.

The capital allocations to regions will be 4·5 per cent. higher overall than this year and distributed mainly under the RAWP process. The table gives details. In addition to the allocations, I expect regions to generate substantially more resources from sales of surplus land and residential accommodation, which can also be used to carry through their capital investment plans.

Health Authority Resource Distribution 1985-86

Regional Health Authority	*Revenue Increase per cent.*	*Capital RAWP share £ million*
Northern	5·8	34·5
Yorkshire	5·9	47·8
Trent	6·8	51·2
East Anglia	6·3	20·4
North West Thames	4·2	34·1
North East Thames	4·2	39·8
South East Thames	4·4	40·5
South West Thames	4·4	31·1
Wessex	6·7	46·7
Oxford	6·3	23·1
South Western	6·3	44·5
West Midlands	6·4	73·7
Mersey	4·9	26·5
North Western	5·5	61·7
TOTAL	5·5	575·6

Notes:

1. The total capital allocation to regional health authorities in 1985-86 is £653·4 million, including dental hospital re-equipment; inner cities bias; strategic shifts; special and development schemes; and 35 per cent. teaching hospital support.
2. Cash figures are subject to parliamentary approval of the Department's estimates.

Asbestos

65. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what health risks exist as a result of the recent deposition of asbestos on a substantial area of South Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that effective measures are under way to clear up the asbestos and the level of asbestos fibres in air measured in the area is very low. In the circumstances, the health risk to anyone is negligible.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he is taking to promote the role in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis of the control of diet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Rheumatoid disease embraces a variety of conditions in relation to which diet can be an important factor. More specifically, research thus far has failed to establish any clear evidence to show that food allergies are a contributory factor in rheumatoid arthritis.

Drugs (Cost)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much the National Health Service has spent on the purchase of drugs from the pharmaceutical industry in 1984; and how this figure compares with that applicable to each year since 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Total National Health Service expenditure attributable to the cost of drugs (excluding the cost of dispensing) was:

	£ million cash
1978-79	686
1979-80	792
1980-81	954

	£ million cash
1981-82	1,091
1982-83	1,257
1983-84*	1,399

* Provisional.

Perinatal Deaths

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure the registration records relating to perinatal deaths contain clinical information indicating the sequence of events preceding death.

Mr. John Patten: Discussions are now in progress with the relevant professions on modifying the medical certificates used for registering stillbirths and neo-natal deaths (that is, deaths in the first four weeks of life). By including in the certificates a more detailed description of adverse events and conditions arising in both the mother and the baby, it will be possible to record at registration the type of information with which the question is concerned. We hope that regulations will be made in time for the new certificate to apply to deaths registered in 1986.

"Wessex Feet"

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received the survey "Wessex Feet" produced by the district chiropodists of Wessex; and if he has plans to publish it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have just received a copy of the first volume of the report of the survey. I understand that the authors are still considering how it should be made more widely available.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had regarding the likely effects on the investment programmes of the research-based pharmaceutical industry of his proposals to limit drugs prescribable on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on 18 December, at column *152*.

Mr. David Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish a list of those medicines on his provisional list of drugs which are to be no longer prescribed under the National Health Service which do not have a generic alternative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We will not finally decide which drugs will no longer be prescribable at public expense through the National Health Service until after our consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions, and the drugs industry, is complete.

Mental Patients (Group Homes)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* social services authorities and *(c)* voluntary organisations have had to put group homes planned for the mentally handicapped and/or mentally ill in the community to different use because of adverse public reaction to their plans.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally. We are aware of occasional press reports, but we have no reason to believe that there are many instances where it has been felt necessary to change the use of such group homes because of adverse public reaction after construction or purchase. Many small local schemes enjoy strong local support in helping residents to integrate into the communities of which they are now part.

Medical Training

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there is any action he will be taking on the recommendation from the Hospital Consultants and specialists association's inquiry that medical training should include specified minimum periods of study and practice in the non-acute sector.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have told the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association that we share its concern that the less popular specialties should be adequately staffed by doctors of high quality. This would imply a broader range of experience and training, both undergraduate and postgraduate, which are matters for the General Medical Council, universities, royal colleges and other independent bodies responsible for the content of medical training.

Housing Benefit

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide his latest estimates for the total numbers of standard housing benefit recipients, differentiating as far as possible between those below and above pensionable age; and if he will estimate how many in each group are also liable for income tax.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of all those in receipt of standard housing benefit with an income *(a)* above the needs allowance and *(b)* below the needs allowance have children: and in each case what percentage of those below pensionable age have children.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *49*]: It is estimated that in Great Britain in autumn 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, 20 per cent. of all standard housing benefit recipients with income above the needs allowance had dependent children. The corresponding estimate of those with incomes below the needs allowance was 18 per cent. Of standard recipients below pensionable age, families with dependent children represented 49 per cent. of those with incomes above and 50 per cent. of those with incomes below the needs allowance.

Family Income Supplement

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide his latest estimates for the total number of family income supplement recipients, together

with an estimate of how many of these are also liable for income tax; and if he will provide the same information for April 1984.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that some 210,000 recipients would be entitled to family income supplement in 1984 and of these some 75 per cent. would be liable for income tax at the date their claim was made. This is the latest information available.

Hospitals (Laundry Tenders)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) for the latest date for which information is available, how many hospital laundry tenders have been won by in-house bids after submission to competitive tender in England in the past 12 months;

(2) if he will give for the latest date for which information is available the details of savings on previous costs achieved by successful in-house bids for hospital laundry services in England;

(3) at the latest date for which the information is available, at which hospitals laundry services have been submitted to competitive tender in England in the past 12 months;

(4) at the latest date for which information is available, how many English hospital laundry contracts have been awarded to private commercial firms in the past 12 months;

(5) if he will give for the latest date for which information is available the cumulative total of savings arising in the past 12 months from the submission of hospital laundry services to competitive tender.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my replies to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 30 October at column *967*, and on 30 November at column *623-24*.

Buckly Caller Office (Member's Correspondence)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he proposes to answer the letter of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to his Department concerning the Buckly caller office closure of 1 June 1984 and the subsequent letter of 11 September 1984 from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside.

Mr. Newton: I am writing to the hon. Member about the case.

West Midlands RHA

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how often the Minister for Health has met the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority during 1984; and how often these meetings have concerned the business of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I frequently meet Mr. Ackers and we seldom resist the temptation to discuss the affairs of the RHA.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the terms of reference for the management consultants who are going to be appointed to review the organisation of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The terms of reference for this review have not yet been drawn up and agreed.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the present chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority was appointed; when his appointment will end; how much he is paid as chairman of the regional health authority; and how many days per week he spends on the business of the regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Mr. James Ackers was appointed chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority on 1 August 1982. His term of office expires on 31 July 1986. He receives the usual honorarium of £8,424 a year. Chairmen's contributions to the running of their authorities cannot be measured in terms of days per week.

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Minister for Health is now prepared to confirm the appointment of Mr. K. Bales as general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes, I have agreed with the West Midlands regional health authority that a review should be carried out by outside consultants of the functions and working of the authority and the establishment of the general management function by the authority. This review will be guided by a steering committee drawn from members of the authority and on which an official of our Department will sit. Mr. Bales will be appointed as general manager for two years, at the end of which period the position will be reviewed. On this basis, the appointment was announced on 13 December.

Highcroft Hospital, Birmingham

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people have been patients at Highcroft hospital in north Birmingham for more than two years; and how many of these patients have not been examined by a dentist within the last two years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally. The hon. Member may wish to approach the chairman of the North Birmingham health authority direct to obtain the information.

Long-stay Patients

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements exist to ensure that adequate records are maintained of the dental treatment received by long-stay patients in hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The maintenance of records of the dental treatment of long-stay patients in hospitals is the responsibility of the appropriate dental consultant who will seek to ensure that records are kept to acceptable professional standards.

Health Authorities (Managers' Contracts)

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if there is any difference between the contract given to the general manager of the West Midlands regional health authority and the contracts given to the general managers appointed by other regional health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Each general manager has an individual contract and there are a number of differences between most of them.

Striking Miners (Housing Benefit)

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what allowance is available under the housing benefit regulations to unmarried miners on strike and living with their parents.

Mr. Newton: As a result of a defect in the Housing Benefits Regulations 1982, any person living with his parents might have been entitled to housing benefit if he was liable to make payments for board and lodging which included an amount in respect of rent and rates. This defect in the regulations was corrected by the Housing Benefits Amendment (No. 4) Regulations, which were laid before the House on 18 December and came into operation on 19 December.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many full-time students claimed the full householder rates of supplementary benefit during their vacations in each of the last four years.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not separately available.

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many full-time students have received housing benefit in each year since 1981.

Mr. Whitney: Information on the number of student claims for housing benefit is not collected by the Department.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has now completed his discussions with regional health authorities on targets for the expansion of services for patients suffering end stage renal failure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend informed health authorities at the beginning of the year of the need for renal services to be developed as a priority within the acute sector. He told them of his intention to set targets against which the expansion of renal service provision would be monitored. The target for each region will be to accept new renal patients for treatment at a minimum annual rate of 40 per million total population by 1987. This will ensure that more patients are accepted for treatment and also that progress is made in raising the level of renal services in the less well provided parts of the country. We have consulted regional health authorities and I am pleased to say that all have agreed these targets as reasonable. South East Thames and South West Thames will be treated as a single region for the purposes of this exercise. I hope that in as many regions as possible the targets will be significantly exceeded, and it is the Government's intention that the provision of renal services will continue to expand after 1987.

Over the last five years we have increased the number of new renal patients accepted for teatment in the United Kingdom by 50 per cent.—from 1,233 (22·1 per million population) in 1979 to 1,846 (33·0 per million population) in 1983. This is a significant achievement, but more still needs to be done.

For most patients who suffer end stage renal failure, the preferred method of treatment is by kidey transplant. The factor limiting the expansion of kidney transplantation has been the availability of donor organs, so in February of this year we launched a new campaign to increase public awareness of the benefits of transplantation and to promote the organ donor card scheme.

The results of the first six months of the campaign were most encouraging; over 11 million new donor cards were distributed, and the number of kidney transplant operations performed was 40 per cent. up on the equivalent period in 1983, which was itself a record year. We hope to continue this progress in 1985.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety

64. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to require all industrial concerns to prepare effective emergency plans.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places duties on employers to ensure that their operations are safe and without risk to health, so far as is reasonably practicable. The duty to provide a safe system of work requires many manufacturers to prepare emergency arrangements. In addition, the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations, which my right hon. Friend laid before Parliament on 18 December, contain a specific requirement for the operators of the larger and more hazardous installations to prepare formal on-site emergency plans; there is also a requirement on local authorities, at county level, to draw up off-site emergency plans for those sites within their boundaries.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons violating the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 have been sent to prison during the 10 years that the Act has been in operation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As yet no sentences of imprisonment have been recorded.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will now introduce legislation to amend the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 whereby any case involving a death or serious injury is taken to Crown court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Most offences under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 can be tried either summarily or, if the defendant requests or the magistrates so decide, on indictment. There are no plans to amend the provisions of the Act relating to offences: however, the maximum fines available on summary conviction have recently been doubled.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in Liverpool are currently engaged in youth training schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of November 1984 there were 5,277 young people in training on the youth training scheme in the Liverpool local authority district.

In Liverpool, as well as nationally, the response to the scheme has been most encouraging and shows that young people recognise the advantages of participating in a high quality training programme.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the evaluation of the social and life skills training element in the youth training scheme both inside and outside colleges of further education.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am satisfied with the arrangements for the evaluation of the personal effectiveness and communications skills element of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied with the qualifications of persons teaching the social and life skills training element in the youth training scheme both inside and outside colleges of further education; and if he will specify the qualifications he requires.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Those providing guidance and assisting in the development of personal effectiveness and communication skills in the workplace will not necessarily be formally qualified but will be responsible adults with experience of working life. We are satisfied that they have the qualities required for the job.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many youngsters on youth training schemes were seriously injured at work at the latest available date in 1984.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The latest available information on the number of young people on the youth training scheme who have been involved in accidents is given in the following table:

Period	*Accidents* Injuries†*			
	Fatalities	*Major*	*Minor*	*Total*
1 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	‡4	100	843	947
1 April 1984 to 30 September 1984	‖3	88	765	856

* Manpower Services Commission accident figures for the youth training scheme are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. However, the figures quoted in the above table will include a number of accidents which did not occur "at work"; in particular, road traffic accidents during scheme time and accidents to trainees in educational situations or establishments, which may not have been reportable to HSE had the individuals been employed.

† Injuries are classified according to the severity criteria of the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurances Regulations 1980.

‡ This figure includes one road traffic accident.

‖ This figure includes two road traffic accidents.

School Leavers

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment what type of youth training scheme provision it is intended to make for school leavers who have completed a technical and vocational education initiative course.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The technical and vocational education initiative comprises individual pilot projects, the first of which began in September 1983, run by local education authorities. Each provides four-year programmes, starting at age 14, of general, technical and vocational education.

A young person completing a TVEI course would be aged 18 and therefore generally not eligible for the youth training scheme which, apart from some limited exceptions, is open only to 16-year-old school leavers and unemployed 17-year-old school leavers.

Many young people having gained basic work skills either within the educational system or through YTS, would go on to specific skills training, for which employers have the prime responsibility.

Adult Training

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the role of area manpower boards in relation to the adult training strategy.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Local responsiveness to training needs is central to the adult training strategy. Area manpower boards have an important role to play in giving strategic advice to the Manpower Services Commission on adult training needs in their area, and their members can individually and collectively play a valuable part in the national adult training campaign which was launched last month with the aim of raising awareness about the importance of adult training.

Trainees (Placings)

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the placing results for trainees aged 19 years and over for the last four years using their training opportunities programme skills three months after course completion as a proportion from *(a)* colleges of further education, *(b)* skillcentres and *(c)* all institutions.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is as follows:

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Colleges of further education	46	42	48*	53*
Skillcentres	36	29	35	46
All institutions	43	37	42	50

* Separate placing figures for colleges of further education are not available for 1982-83 and 1983-84. Figures quoted for these years are for all institutions except skillcentres.

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for employment what are the placing results for the last four years for trainees aged 19 years and over as a proportion in employment three months after course completion from *(a)* colleges of further education, *(b)* skillcentres and *(c)* all institutions.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is as follows:

	Colleges of further education	*Skillcentres*	*All institutions*
1980-81	55	47	53
1981-82	50	41	47
1982-83	*58	46	52
1983-84	*62	57	60

* Separate placing figures for colleges of further education are not available for 1982-83 and 1983-84. Figures quoted for these years are for all institutions except skillcentres.

Collaborative Projects

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many local collaborative projects have now been approved in each Manpower Services Commission region; and what is the average funding per project and the total sum now committed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: By the end of November 78 small-scale local collaborative project contracts had been signed and 13 large-scale projects had been approved (subject to conditions in a few cases). The position in each Manpower Services Commission region was as follows:

	Small-scale	*Large-scale*
Scotland	—	1
Northern	6	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	10	1
North West	9	—
Midlands	17	2
Wales	6	1
South West	8	—
South East	19	4
London	3	2
	78	13

The average funding for a small-scale project is £11,499 and £45,507 for a large-scale project. The total sum now committed to small-scale projects is £896,897 and large-scale projects approved so far require funding of £591,590.

Food and Drink Industries

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the number of job losses in the food and drink industries since 1 May.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about job gains and job losses is not available from the Department's statistics, but an indication of net changes can be seen by comparing levels of employees in employment at different dates.

Between May and October, in Great Britain, the estimated number of employees in employment in the food and drink manufacturing industries (activity headings 4115-4283 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification) increased by 17,200. The estimate for October, the latest available, is provisional.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the labour force has been unemployed in the county of Derbyshire for over three years, two years and one year, respectively.

Mr. Alan Clark: Following is the latest available information in respect of unemployed claimants on 11 October 1984.

Rates of long-term unemployment—Derbyshire

Duration of unemployment	*Per cent. of all workers**
Over three years	1·9
Over two years	3·5
Over one year	6·5

* The figures are expressed as a percentage of employees in employment, plus the unemployed. Since ward-based unemployment figures by duration corresponding exactly to county boundaries will not be available until mid 1985, the figures relate to the best fit of the travel-to-work areas and the base figures relate to 1978, rather than 1983 as for the new travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed *(a)* adults and *(b)* young people aged between 16 and 21 years were available for every job vacancy registered in the county of Derbyshire at the latest available date.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 11 October 1984, the latest date for which an analysis of unemployment by age is available, there was a total of 9,307 unemployed claimants aged between 16 and 19 years, and a total of 39,826 unemployed claimants aged 20 years and over in Derbyshire. On 5 October 1984 there were 76 vacancies unfilled at careers offices in Derbyshire and 1,690 unfilled vacancies at jobcentres. These figures cannot be added together because some vacancies are notified to both careers offices and jobcentres.

Ratios of unemployed persons to unfilled vacancies cannot be calculated in the form requested because vacancies at jobcentres are normally open to persons of all age groups.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people between the ages of 16 and 21 years were unemployed in the county of Derbyshire at the nearest available date; and what was the comparable figure at the end of 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on unemployment in the 16 to 19 and 20 to 24 years age groups for the county of Derbyshire is available in the House of Commons' Library.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of redundancies in the county of Derbyshire in 1983 and to the nearest available date in 1984.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1983 a total of 6,494 redundancies were confirmed as due to occur in the county of Derbyshire. During the first 10 months of 1984, the figure was 6,716 (provisional).

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs were lost in the following industries in the county of Derbyshire in 1983 and to the nearest available date in 1984: *(a)* metal manufacturing, *(b)* textiles and clothing, *(c)* food and drink, *(d)* engineering, *(e)* vehicle manufacturing, *(f)* construction and *(g)* furniture.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available. Information on job losses is not collected. Net changes in employment in groups of industries can be supplied, but,

for areas smaller than regions, only for those dates when censuses of employment are conducted. Censuses of employment have been taken triennially since 1978 and the latest results are for September 1981.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the current level of unemployment in the county of Derbyshire compared to the national level;

(2) what is the level of female unemployment in the county of Derbyshire at the latest available date.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is available in the House of Commons Library.

Asbestos

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many asbestos removal jobs have been notified to each of the Health and Safety Executive's areas under requirements imposed on removal organisations by licences issued under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of asbestos removal jobs notified to each of the Health and Safety Executive's 21 area offices as a result of these requirements on 31 October 1984 was as follows:

		Number of jobs
Area 1:	South West	278
Area 2:	South	310
Area 3:	South East	290
Area 4:	London North West	309
Area 5:	London North East	239
Area 6:	London South	403
Area 7:	East Anglia	211
Area 8:	Northern Home Counties	223
Area 9:	East Midlands	145
Area 10:	West Midlands	186
Area 11:	Wales	149
Area 12:	Marches	160
Area 13:	North Midlands	167
Area 14:	South Yorkshire and Humberside	232
Area 15:	West and North Yorkshire	218
Area 16:	Greater Manchester	318
Area 17:	Merseyside	232
Area 18:	North West	159
Area 19:	North East	256
Area 20:	Scotland East	202
Area 21:	Scotland West	237
Total		4,974

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many site visits have been made in each of the Health and Safety Executive's areas to asbestos removal operations which have as a requirement of licences issued under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 been notified to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of site visits made in each of the Health and Safety Executive's 21 areas as a result of these requirements on 31 October 1984 was as follows:

		Number of site visits
Area 1:	South West	74
Area 2:	South	15
Area 3:	South East	25
Area 4:	London North West	110
Area 5:	London North East	44
Area 6:	London South	81
Area 7:	East Anglia	27
Area 8:	Northern Home Counties	69
Area 9:	East Midlands	63
Area 10:	West Midlands	92
Area 11:	Wales	32
Area 12:	Marches	95
Area 13:	North Midlands	37
Area 14:	South Yorkshire and Humberside	51
Area 15:	West and North Yorkshire	78
Area 16:	Greater Manchester	90
Area 17:	Merseyside	54
Area 18:	North West	34
Area 19:	North East	71
Area 20:	Scotland East	146
Area 21:	Scotland West	53
Total		1,341

These figures may include more than one visit to any one site.

Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the members of the Manpower Services Commission London north area manpower board; and which organisations they represent.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The membership of MSC London north area manpower board is as follows:

Chairman—Lady Plowden

Employer Representatives
Mr. K. Jackson
Mr. J. L. Raker
Mr. A. C. Ranger
Mr. B. Davies
Mr. J. E. Fletcher

Employee Representatives
Mr. E. Suckling
Mr. R. Banks
Mr. J. Mercer
Mr. P. Bonython
Mr. A. Shah

Local Authority Representatives
Councillor N. Fletcher
Councillor C. C. Goldwater

Education Service Represenatives
Mr. A. Lenney
Mr. A. C. Hutchinson
Mr. W. T. Newbold

Representative of Voluntary Organisations
Mr. S. Abbott

In addition there are two co-opted members:
Mr. R. Walker (co-opted to represent the interests of ethnic minorities) and
Mrs. B. C. Luxon (co-opted to represent womens' interests).

Wages and Labour Costs

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the ratio of net wage income to total labour costs in the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States and *(c)* the EEC as a whole.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Comparable informtion on the ratio of net wage income to total labour costs is not available.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in *(a)* real wages and *(b)* real labour costs per employee in the last 10 years for which figures are available in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States and *(c)* the EEC as a whole.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The latest information relates to manufacturing industry for the period 1971 to 1981 and is shown in the following table:

Average annual increase (percentage)	*Great Britain*	*United States*
(i) Average gross weekly earnings*	15·7	8·4
(ii) Total hourly labour costs (adults)‡	16·9	9·3
(iii) Consumer prices	†13·9	8·4
(iv) "Real" gross weekly earnings‖	1·6	0·0
(v) "Real" total hourly labour costs‖	2·6	0·8

Information for the EEC as a whole is not available.

* Great Britain figure relates to all employees; the United States figure relates to production workers on private payrolls.

† Retail prices index (all items) for the United Kingdom.

‡ *Source:* "Wages and total labour costs for workers—international survey 1971-1981", Swedish employers' confederation, Stockholm 1984. Estimates converted to national currency.

‖ (iv)=(i) relative to (iii);
(v)=(ii) relative to (iii).

Amble Special Training Centre

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Employment why the Amble special training centre, funded under the special programmes scheme, has been closed; what provision has been made to place the trainees in other centres; and what consultations were undertaken with local authorities before the decision was taken.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Amble community workshop run by Northumberland county council's special programmes agency has not closed. Discussions are taking place between the Manpower Services Commission and the county council about the balance of training to be offered at the workshop from April 1985 under the youth training scheme.

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the effect on jobs of the imposition of value added tax on books, periodicals and newspapers.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have been asked to reply.

While the imposition of value added tax on books, periodicals and newspapers could lead to reductions in sales, taxation would be only one of a number of factors affecting employment and it would not be possible to determine its precise effect on the publishing and related industries.

CIVIL SERVICE

Trade Union Membership

Mr. Madel asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will ensure that no individual will be refused employment in the Civil Service and no civil servant will be sacked from the Civil Service because he is not a member of a trade union.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yes. Civil servants are recruited by fair and open competition on merit. The conditions of eligibility for all recruitment schemes for the Civil Service are determined solely by the requirements for performing the duties of the post or grade. Equally, no civil servant will be dismissed for non-membership of a trade union. These are well-established principles and they are fully in line with the Government's general employment policies and legislation.

THE ARTS

British Museum

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts if he has anything to add to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *489*, about representations on the entrance hall of the British museum.

Mr. Waldegrave: As I have told the House, my right hon. and noble Friend has received representations on this matter from the Georgian Group only. I understand, however, that the Victorian Society has made representations direct to the British museum.

PRIME MINISTER

Regional Development Grant

Q30. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she will estimate the implications for the level of unemployment in Wales of the recent changes in regional development grant.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

A new, more sharply focused and job-related regional development grant will considerably increase both the competitive ability of the assisted areas including Wales and the results of regional expenditure in terms of new employment created.

Treason

Q41. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Prime Minister if she has any proposals to seek to amend the law relating to treason.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has no such proposals at present.

Easter Fluchter

Q76. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Easter Fluchter.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Fisher asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Adley asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 20 December.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minster if she will list her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Duffy asked the Prime Minster if she will publish her official engagements for 20 December.

Mr. Biffen: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friends, the hon. Gentlemen and the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

Outer Space (Arms)

Mr. Freud asked the Prime Minster what assessment was made of United Nations resolution 38/70 about prevention of an arms race in outer space prior to the casting of the United Kingdom vote: what discussions were held with other countries, apart from the relevant deliberations of that United Nations session prior to the vote; and whether she will make a statment.

Mr. Luce: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom regularly consults its allies and European Community partners on United Nations Resolutions, and did so in this case. In 1983 the United Kingdom abstained on this resolution, as was made clear at the time, not because of disagreement with many of its objectives but because it ignored or prejudged a number of important issues still under discussion in international fora. At this year's United Nations General Assembly the United Kingdom voted in favour of a draft resolution sponsored by non-aligned countries on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mr. Gorbachev

Mr. Wareing asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent talks with Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Rifkind: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend gave a lunch followed by talks with Mr. Gorbachev on 16 December. The talks lasted some two and three quarter hours and were business-like and friendly. They dealt most with current issues in East-West relations and the prospects for arms control. There was also a brief discussion of bilateral relations and Anglo-Soviet trade.

Mr. Gorbachev brought the Prime Minister a message from President Chernenko. In thanking him for this, the Prime Minister recalled her useful and constructive talk with Mr. Chernenko last February.

There was agreement on the need for increased contacts between Britain and the Soviet Union as a step towards diminishing misunderstanding between East and West and creating the increased confidence necessary for successful negotiations on arms control. The Prime Minister impressed on Mr. Gorbachev the sincerity of the West's wish to achieve security at a lower level of armaments, with the essential conditions of balance and adequate verification.

Supplementary Benefit (Board and Lodging)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Prime Minister what response she is making to the representations sent to her from the Disabilities Study Unit concerning the Government's proposals to restrict the payment of supplementary benefit for board and lodging in the case of people living outside their home area; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: I have been asked to reply.

Representations received from individuals and organisations by 28 December will be considered under the consultation exercise being conducted by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Departmental Policy Reviews

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister how many policy reviews have been announced by Government Departments since June 1983, how many such reviews have been completed to date; how many management consultants have been retained by Government Departments since June 1983; and at what total cost to date.

Mr. Biffen [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. 82]: Policy review is in many cases a continuing process. But since June 1983 we have announced some 130 separate reviews and completed about 50. These include some efficiency scrutinies and studies which have a significant impact on policy. In the same period, Departments have let about 70 different contracts to management consultants at a cost to date of some £2½ million.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Books and Periodicals (VAT)

Mr. Coombs asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual revenue from the imposition of value added tax at the standard rate on periodicals.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is estimated that the net additional full year revenue at 1984-85 prices would be about £65 million.

Personal Allowances and Taxation

Mr. Squire asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage increase in personal allowances would be possible if the whole of the £1·5 billion fiscal adjustment predicted in his autumn statement were used in this way;

how many families with children would be lifted out of tax by such an increase; and what would be the impact on the numbers caught in the poverty trap.

Mr. Moore: A full answer would require a complete economic simulation. However, a reasonable approximation can be obtained from the direct revenue cost of the change in 1985-86. An increase of just under 10 per cent. on top of indexation in personal allowances (including age allowance) would have a direct revenue cost of about £1½ billion in 1985-86. This would give increases of £310 in the married man's allowance, and of £200 in the single person's and wife's earned income allowance, above the indexed values in table 4.1 of the autumn statement. Such increases would take about 850,000 people out of tax compared to indexation of allowances in 1985-86, including about 75,000 families with children. Of these, about 15,000 would be receiving family income supplement.

Money Supply

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in the money supply, narrowly defined in both nominal and real terms, in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan in the decades ending 1963, 1973 and 1983;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the increase in money supply, broadly defined in both nominal and real terms, in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan in the decades ending 1963, 1973 and 1983.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the velocity of circulation of money in the United Kingdom compares with that of other industrial countries; and whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the change in the velocity of circulation in each case since 1973.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Definitions of money differ between countries. Statistics on money, prices, national income and gross national product are available on a consistent basis in the "International Financial Statistics" year books for 1983 and 1984, published by the International Monetary Fund. These statistics are not always based on the preferred national definitions.

Board of Inland Revenue

Mr. Trotter asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times each year the Board of Inland Revenue meets; and what was the date of the last meeting.

Mr. Moore: The Board of Inland Revenue meets on a regular basis to discuss matters of importance. It has had 12 meetings so far this year. The last meeting was held on 11 December.

Sterling Exchange Rate

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give his estimate of the effect which the increase in the real sterling exchange rate since 1976 has had on the United Kingdom's balance of trade in manufactures.

Mr. Peter Rees: It is not possible to give a reliable estimate of this effect.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has happened to the cargo from the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia consisting of food supplies intended for miners' families which was seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Hayhoe: I assume that the question refers to cargo which arrived at Hull in October.

The foodstuffs detained by Customs on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were re-exported some weeks ago, on behalf of the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam.

Gilt-edged Securities

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the immediate saving to the Exchequer by way of interest if gilt-edged securities were to be converted into index-linked stocks of comparable maturities at current prices and yields.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It would be unrealistic to suppose that holders of conventional gilts would voluntarily exchange all their holdings for indexed gilts at current relative prices.

Pension Funds (Stocks)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the value of *(a)* gilt-edged and *(b)* index-linked stocks held by pension funds.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Estimates of the nominal value of pension funds' holdings of gilt-edged stocks, including but not distinguishing indexed gilts, at March of each year are published in an appendix to the regular article on the national debt in the December edition of the Bank of England *Quarterly Bulletin*. Estimates of the market value of pension funds' holdings of conventional and indexed gilts as at end-December 1983 are published in "Financial Statistics", table 7.12.

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the nominal value of gilt-edged securities held by pension funds and the amount of interest payable thereon; and what is his estimate of the saving to the Exchequer in interest payments from the conversion of such securities into index-linked stocks at current prices and yields.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I have given today to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). Because no statistics are available for the coupons payable on gilts held by pension funds, it is not possible to give a reliable estimate of the interest payable on these holdings.

Economic Indices

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average rate of growth of *(a)* gross national product, *(b)* manufacturing output, *(c)* productivity and *(d)* inflation for the following periods: (i) 1954 to 1964, (ii) 1964 to 1974, (iii) 1970 to 1974, (iv) 1974 to 1979 and (v) 1979 to 1984.

Mr. Peter Rees: Recent figures for gross national product, manufacturing output, prices and productivity are

available in the November 1984 issue of *Economic Trends* and the 1984 edition of the "United Kingdom National Accounts". Earlier figures are published in the *Economic Trends Annual Supplement*, 1984 edition. Figures for the whole of 1984 will not be available until next year. Apart from the 1984 figures the only figure requested that is not readily available from these published sources is that for productivity growth between 1954 and 1964. No continuous estimates of productivity are available from official statistical publications due to changes in the coverage of the employed labour force series in 1959.

Protected Buildings

Mr. Latham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has yet completed his review of the 75 per cent. test for substantially reconstructed protected buildings; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Shersby asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has yet completed his review of the 75 per cent. test for substantially reconstructed protected buildings; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yes. I am now satisfied that the "75 per cent. test" (one of two tests required for VAT zero rating of the sale or long lease of a substantially reconstructed protected building) is too severe to provide the broad equivalence with the old "50 per cent. test" which I promised in announcing the reliefs on 18 May, at columns *271-72*. A Treasury order will be laid as soon as possible after the Christmas recess reducing the qualifying figure from 75 to 60 per cent. This change has been welcomed by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, to whose members and staff I should pay tribute for their help with the difficult task of reviewing the matter. Finally, I should add that since the order cannot have retrospective effect, I have authorised Customs and Excise to operate extra-statutorily as if 60 per cent., and not 75 per cent. had been the qualifying percentage between 1 June 1984 and the operative date of the order.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Tracey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on the retail price index of an increase in the British Broadcasting Corporation colour television licence fee to £65.

Mr. Peter Rees: An increase in the colour licence fee to £65 would increase the level of the RPI by 0·16 per cent.

Mortgage Valuation Fees (VAT)

Sir John Page asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the practice of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in relation to the levying of value added tax on mortgage valuation fees charged by *(a)* chartered surveyors and *(b)* building society staff surveyors.

Mr. Hayhoe: Supplies of surveying services by VAT registered chartered surveyors are liable to VAT at the standard rate of 15 per cent. Mortgage valuation fees charged to building societies by independent chartered surveyors are therefore subject to the tax. Where it is the practice of a building society to use its own staff to survey properties there is no supply of services for VAT purposes and no tax is chargeable.

Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if, for each decile group in the income distribution, he will publish information showing the amount of taxes paid as a proportion of gross income broken down between (i) direct taxes, (ii) indirect taxes and (iii) all taxes for the most recent year or tax year available; and whether he will also show the average level of gross income in each of the income groups specified;

(2) whether he will publish the latest estimates of the real change in taxes, rates and national insurance in 1984-85 compared with 1978-79 broken down *(a)* into the following categories: (i) income tax, (ii) corporation tax, (iii) North Sea taxes, (iv) capital taxes and stamp duty, (v) national insurance contributions, employees, (vi) national insurance contributions, employers, (vii) national insurance surcharge, (viii) local authority rates and (ix) taxes on expenditure; and *(b)* to show the division of changes in income tax between (i) taxes on investment income and (ii) taxes on those in the lower and upper deciles and in the four quartiles of tax units ranked by income.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Gross Domestic Product

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the gross domestic product was represented by taxation, including national insurance contributions and local authority rates in 1984; and whether he will provide a breakdown of the percentage figure between taxes on income, taxes on expenditure, national insurance, capital taxes, stamp duty and rates in 1984 and for each year from 1979 onwards.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all the occupational pension schemes in the public sector, both local and central Government employees, whose members are required to take all or part of their pension in a lump sum on retirement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Fixed lump sums form part of the occupational pension scheme benefits for the Civil Service, local government, teaching, NHS and the armed forces. Such an arrangement also applies in a number of occupational schemes covering the staff of fringe bodies.

Pensions (Taxation)

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue in 1985-86 from taxing that part of the lump sum taken on retirement in 1985-86 accruing to members of pension schemes from contributions after April 1985.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish information for 1984 showing for each European Economic Community country as well as the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries *(a)* the level of gross income in pounds sterling at which a single person becomes liable for income tax, *(b)* the starting rate of income tax, *(c)* the combined starting rate of income tax and any social security contributions and *(d)* separate figures on typical rates of local taxes, where appropriate, together with information showing the level of income in pounds sterling at which (i) a single person, (ii) a married couple and (iii) a married couple with two children become liable to income tax at 30 per cent. on earned income in each country.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

World Bank

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how often he and any other Ministers in his Department have met the executive director of the World Bank appointed by the United Kingdom to discuss the policies or reports of the World Bank.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer meets with the United Kingdom executive director from time to time. In addition, there are frequent contacts between Treasury officials and the United Kingdom delegation in Washington on World Bank issues of concern to the Treasury.

Landlord's Fixtures

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is in a position to issue draft legislation on capital allowances for expenditure on landlord's fixtures.

Mr. Moore: With my approval, the Inland Revenue will be publishing draft legislation on this subject next Thursday 27 December.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Forman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to amend the capital gains tax rules which apply to assets disposed of in a series of transactions; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: Yes. The Board of Inland Revenue has been advised that the relevant legislation (section 151 of the Capital Gains Tax Act 1979) applies only to those transactions which occur within the two-year period preceding the latest transaction in the series. More generally, I am aware of the unsatisfactory nature of the present law and I am examining ways in which this can be resolved.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Merchant asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is considering any changes in nationalised industry legislation.

Mr. Peter Rees: The Government intend to legislate in due course to update various aspects of nationalised industry statutes. On behalf of the various Departments which sponsor nationalised industries, I have today sent a consultation note to the Nationalised Industries' Chairmen's Group setting out various proposals. I have aranged for a copy of this note to be placed in the Library of the House.

Kedleston Hall

Mr. Cormack asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in the negotiation over the acceptance of Kedleston hall, its parklands and some of its principal contents by the nation in lieu of tax liabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend and I visited Kedleston in May of this year and assured Lord Scarsdale that the Government shared his hopes that a solution could be found which secured the future of Kedleston hall and its contents for the nation, retained its historic link with the Curzon family and satisfied the outstanding tax liability on the estate. The National Heritage Memorial Fund was subsequently asked to prepare a report on the costs of several different methods of achieving these objectives. I understand that following receipt of certain financial information from a number of parties, including the trustees of the Kedleston estate that report should be available by the end of this month. Thereafter negotiations will proceed at a pace dictated by the co-operation of the several parties involved the availability of resources and the need to obtain the court's approval to any scheme that emerges.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the limit on the sum of total expenditure which the Common Market Council of Ministers will, by qualified majority, be able to determine when the additional own resources and budgetary restraint mechanism come into effect.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *121*]: At the beginning of the budgetary procedure each year the Council will fix a "reference framework" as part of the arrangemets on budgetary discipline. This framework will be fixed by qualified majority, but it will constitute the total sum to be made available for the component parts of Community expenditure, which are themselves subject to budgetary discipline in the following manner. Article 1 of the Council conclusions on budgetary discipline provides that the Council will fix this amount in accordance with the financial guidelines governing expenditure on agricultural market support and with the maximum rate limit on non-obligatory expenditure. The guideline for agricultural expenditure states that its rate of increase must be less than the rate of growth of the own resources base. Articles 3, 4 and 5 of the budgetary discipline conclusions lay down the method for calculating the guideline each year. The rule for calculating the maximum rate for non-obligatory expenditure is laid down in article 203(9) of the European Community treaty. Provision will also be made within the reference framework for obligatory expenditue other than that on agricultural market support.

Royal Mint

Mr. Merchant asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated value of the Royal Mint as a trading concern.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *189*]: At the 31 March 1984 the audited historic cost accounts show a net asset value of £32·059 million; the audited current cost accounts show a net asset value of £40·087 million. Precise valuation of the Royal Mint as a trading concern would require complex and costly analysis.

I would also refer my hon. Friend to the detailed figures contained in the 1984 annual report of the Royal Mint and the Royal Mint trading fund accounts published as a White Paper (HC 48) on 17 July 1984.

SCOTLAND

Woodlands

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure the safety of coppice woodland from clearance for agriculture or replacement with conifers.

Mr. John MacKay: The felling of coppice of more than 15 centimetres (6in) in diameter requires a licence from the Forestry Commission. Such licences usually require that the land on which the felling takes place is to be managed in accordance with the rules and practice of good forestry in such a way as to secure its restocking by coppice regrowth.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that ancient semi-natural woodlands in Britain are not damaged or destroyed by the exploitation of the provision in the felling licensing regulations by which 30 cubic metres of timber may be felled per quarter without a felling licence.

Mr. John MacKay: This is a matter which is being considered in the context of the Forestry Commission's review of the policy for broadleaved woodlands, following the publication of the consultative paper "Broadleaves in Britain" earlier this year.

Natural Library (Board Membership)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to including an hon. Member for a Scottish constituency on the board of the National Library.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have given full consideration to the provision in clause 17 of the National Heritage (Scotland) Bill and remain satisfied with the continued inclusion among the trustees of the National Library of Scotland of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher) ex officio.

Prisoners (Pay)

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when the rate of pay for work done by prisoners was last reviewed; what plans he has for an uprating; and whether the current rates of pay take account of cost increases in the range of goods available for purchase by prisoners.

Mr. Younger: The rate of pay is reviewed annually, the most recent increase having been made in October. Adjustments now take account of the average increase in public sector pay rather than price movements in the range of goods available for purchase by prisoners.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what rates are paid to prisoners for work in prison at present; and what were the comparable figures five and 10 years ago.

Mr. Younger: The rates vary according to the type of work performed by an inmate, whether an adult or a young offender. Currently they range from a minimum flat rate of 90p per week to a maximum of £3·40 per week for piece work. Comparable figures for five years ago are 70p minimum and £2·20 maximum; and for 10 years ago 25p minimum, 96p maximum.

Edinburgh Bypass

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the expected timetable for the starts and completions of the east and west sections of the dual carriageway bypass south of Edinburgh; and whether on completion this route will be given trunk road classification.

Mr. Younger: The timetable for the construction of the Edinburgh city bypass is the responsibility of Lothian regional council. Work on the Sighthill section is under way and I understand that completion is expected in the latter half of 1987. According to the latest information available to my Department the time table for the remaining sections is as follows:

Section	*Start*	*Completion*
Burdiehouse	mid-1986	early-1989
Gilmerton	late-1987	late-1989
Millerhill	late-1986	late-1988

Progress of works will depend upon planning and land acquisition procedures, and the availability of resources.

I have at present no proposals to trunk the completed bypass.

A7 (Edinburgh-Carlisle)

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what further plans he has for improvements in the A7 trunk route between Edinburgh and Carlisle, following the scheme at Canonbie.

Mr. Younger: Bypasses of Dalkeith, Middleton and Langholm and a realignment of the Synton-Mossend section, each costing over £1 million, are planned. The following minor schemes (under £1 million) are also envisaged.

Region and Scheme

Dumfries and Galloway
- Improvement north of Eweslees
- Improvement at Eskdalemuir Junction

Borders
- Falahill-Heriot Diversion
- Newton Farm Diversion
- Sandbed, Hawick
- Newmill Village
- Parkdaill
- South of Gilston Road

In all cases, construction will depend on the satisfactory completion of detailed investigation, design and statutory procedures and on the availability of finance.

Defective Housing

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what allocation is being made to local authorities in respect of defective housing including Orlit housing and Blackburn Orlit housing.

Mr. Ancram: No specific provisional allocation has been made for 1985-86 in respect of defective houses in local authority ownership. However, in reaching decisions on individual authorities' provisional capital allocations on the HRA block, the fullest consideration has been given to their statements of need in this regard, as contained in the forward capital programmes which authorities have submitted. The increase of £43 million in next year's capital allocations on this block should allow scope for authorities to undertake realistically phased programmes of remedial work according to the priority they attach to this particular aspect of housing need.

The provisional allocations announced this week are not intended to cover authorities' financial liabilities under the Housing Defects Act 1984. The intention is to consult authorities during the course of 1985-86 with a view to issuing appropriate supplementary allocations.

Highlands and Islands Airports

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the rate revenue from the Civil Aviation Authority in respect of each of the Highlands and Islands airports for the years 1983-84 and 1984-85; and what is the estimated revenue for these airports in 1985-86.

Mr. Ancram: The rates paid by the Civil Aviation Authority in respect of each aerodrome in 1983-84 and 1984-85 were as set out in the table:

£'000

	1983-84	1984-85
Benbecula	144	166
Inverness	184	198
Islay	32	24
Kirkwall	60	76
Stornoway	125	132
Tiree	21	22
Wick	59	62
Sumburgh	520	672

It is not possible to estimate the rates payable in 1985-86 because of the impending general rates revaluation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it his policy to provide a subsidy for the running costs of any aerodromes in the Highlands and Islands which may be taken over by local authorities;

(2) what plans he has to alter the expenditure limits imposed on local authorities which may take over the running of aerodromes in the Highlands and Islands;

(3) how many local authorities have shown an interest in the acquisition of the Highlands and Islands airports.

Mr. Ancram: Local authorities, and other potential purchasers, have until 31 December to make any offers for the airports. The Government have made it clear that subsidy will continue to be available where necessary to ensure a level of service adequate to meet the essential needs of the local communities. Any additional expenditure incurred by local authorities would be taken into account in calculating local authority relevant expenditure.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy regarding the price for which he would accept an offer or tender for any of the Highlands and Islands airports.

Mr. Ancram: Offers or tenders will be considered on their merits against the objectives of retaining the airport facilities and securing their provision in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it a condition of sale of airports in the Highlands and Islands that any potential purchaser would have to maintain an adequate and satisfactory service.

Mr. Ancram: The aerodromes will be sold subject to conditions designed to ensure that the essential needs of the communities served are met.

Revaluation

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from local authorities and other bodies over the 1985 revaluation.

Mr. Ancram: The likely effects of the 1985 revaluation have been discussed at ministerial and official meetings with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. In the light of these discussions and of estimates provided by assessors of the likely effect of the changes on different classes of property, my right hon. Friend decided earlier this month to increase fivefold the domestic rate relief element in the rate support grant, to give local authorities an additional £19 million in grant for 1985-86, and to reduce the level of industrial derating from 1985-86 onwards from 50 per cent. to 40 per cent. Questions about the valuation and rating of individual properties are not for my right hon. Friend but the general public and hon. Members continue to demonstrate in correspondence with him a significant level of interest in the various aspects of the revaluation.

Building Standards

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the organisations invited to submit comments following the issue of his consultation document on "Part Q (Housing Standards)" of the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations have indicated their support or opposition to the proposed changes.

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) on 5 December at columns *211-212*.

Rate Fund Contribution

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate in respect of each district council in Scotland the assumptions as to future rent levels upon which the rate fund contribution limitation was calculated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend estimates that his proposal to set an aggregate limit of £89·5 million on the

amount which authorities may estimate to carry from their general rate fund to the credit of their housing revenue account in 1985-86 would imply an average increase of £1·02 per week on the current Scottish average council house rent of approximately £10·45. This calculation is based on the assumption that forecast expenditure on management and maintenance will increase by no more than 5 per cent. next year and that local authorities' estimated loan charges will total £399·5 million.

The rent increases imposed by individual authorities are likely to vary considerably about this average. My right hon. Friend has not made detailed assumptions about future rent levels in individual authorities. These will depend on authorities' own decisions, not least on the level of provision they intend to make for management and maintenance and the extent to which they have in the past budgeted within housing expenditure limits.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what increases he proposes to the provision made for the Royal Scottish Museum, the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, the National Galleries of Scotland, and the National Library of Scotland and to the grants made to the Scottish Museums Council and the Scottish Film Council in 1985-86.

Mr. Younger: Subject to parliamentary approval I propose to increase the net provision, excluding purchase grants, for the National Museums (the Royal Scottish Museum and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland) by £331,000 in 1985-86 (12 per cent.) over the 1984-85 provision; and I propose to allocate an additional £700,000 in 1985-86 through the Property Services Agency, most of which will be used to maintain the fabric of the museum facilities.

I propose to increase the net provision of the National Galleries of Scotland by £99,000 (6 per cent., discounting special extra provision of £30,000 for a new telephone exchange authorised in 1984-85) and the National Library of Scotland by £236,000 (9 per cent.). In the case of both institutions, these increases take account of the fact that new accommodation to house their collections and facilities has either just been provided or is being prepared. The additional provision will enable the galleries to make better use of this accommodation, and will allow the National Library to begin to take on the specialist staff required for the opening in 1987 of the Scottish science reference library.

I also intend to increase purchase grants for the national institutions and the local museum purchase funds by £345,000 (13 per cent.) overall. The total increases in net provision for 1985-86 will therefore amount to 12 per cent. for the National Museums, 9 per cent. for the National Galleries of Scotland and 10 per cent. for the National Library of Scotland.

I am proposing to increase the Scottish Museum Council's grant, including grant to the Museum Documentation Association, by £117,000 (41 per cent.) and the Scottish Film Council's grant by £74,000 (22 per cent.) The provision for the Scottish Film Council includes an additional £10,000 in the grant which is paid through the Council towards the Scottish film production fund.

Local Authorities (Ministerial Default Powers)

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out in detail the range of default powers open to him and other Ministers in dealing with local authorities in Scotland in the same form as used by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in his reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 11 April 1984, *Official Report*, column *249*.

Mr. Younger [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 December 1984, c. *217*]: I have identified the following default powers.

GENERAL

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, section 211

The Secretary of State or any appropriate Minister, if he is satisfied that a local authority have failed to do what is required of them under any enactment or if he is of opinion that an investigation should be made into whether they have so failed, may cause a local inquiry to be held. If after the inquiry the Secretary of State or appropriate Minister is satisfied that there has been a failure on the part of the authority he may make an order declaring them to be in default and directing them to remedy the default.

(*Note:* Under section 211(3) of the 1973 Act, and, in respect of other default powers mentioned below, under section 91 of the Court of Session Act 1868, if a local authority fails to comply ultimate enforcement may be by order of the Court of Session on an application by the Lord Advocate.)

FINANCE

Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, section 104

The Secretary of State may make an order giving effect to any recommendation by the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland where the Controller of Audit has made a special report to the Commission. (Under section 102(3) of the 1973 Act the Controller of Audit is required to make a special report to the Commission on a local authority's accounts in certain specified circumstances. These include *(a)* failure to bring into account any sum which ought to have been brought into account; *(b)* loss arising from negligence by any person or from failure of the authority to carry out a statutory duty; *(c)* failure by the authority to take steps to remedy the accounting of any sum to the wrong account. If the Commission find that any item of expenditure falls within the specified circumstances they are required to send the special report to the Secretary of State together with their findings, and they may recommend him to make an order *(a)* requiring any person responsible to make a payment to the local authority or *(b)* directing the authority to rectify its accounts.)

Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, section 111

Under subsections 1*(d)* and *(e)* the Secretary of State may make regulations providing for the payment of interest by one local authority to another or to a body such as a joint board in respect of payments of rates or requisitions which are not made by the prescribed date.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1981, section 19

If information required from an authority under section 199 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 is not given timeously, the Secretary of State may make an estimate of any element of the required information, which is then deemed to be information given by the authority.

PLANNING

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972, section 15

The Secretary of State may carry out a survey or prepare, alter, repeal or replace a structure or local plan; or may authorise another planning authority to do these things.

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972, section 260(1)

The Secretary of State, after consulting with the planning authority, may make orders under section 42 (revoking or modifying planning permission), section 49 (requiring the discontinuance or removal of development), section 49A (prohibiting resumption of winning and working of minerals),

section 49B (requiring steps to be taken for the protection of the environment after suspension of winning and working minerals) and tree preservation orders. Section 260(4) provides that the Secretary of State must give the planning authority an opportunity of being heard by a person appointed for the purpose if he proposes to make an order under section 260(1).

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972, section 260(5)

The Secretary of State may, after consulting with the planning authority, serve a completion notice under section 41, an enforcement notice under section 84, a stop notice under section 87 and a listed building enforcement notice under section 92.

Town and Country Planning (Enforcement of Control) (Scotland) Regulations 1984, Regulation 8

This applies the Regulations to enforcement notices issued by the Secretary of State under section 260(5) of the 1972 Act.

HOUSING

The Housing and Town Development (Scotland) Act 1957, section 16

The Secretary of State may, after holding an inquiry, make orders declaring an auhtority to be in default of an overspill agreement or town development scheme and requiring the authority to remedy the default by taking such action as may be specified in the orders.

Tenants' Rights Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, section 30(9)

The Secretary of State may direct an islands or district council to change the rate of interest which it charges on its home loans if he considers that the rate being charged does not satisfy the requirements of subsection 30(4).

EDUCATION

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, section 70

The Secretary of State may, if he is satisfied that an education authority, the managers of a school or educational establishment, or other persons, have failed to carry out any duty imposed on them by or for the purposes of the Act or of any other enactment relating to education, make an order requiring them to discharge that duty by a specified date. If the duty is not then discharged by the specified date the Secretary of State may make arrangements for the discharge of the duty, recovering the expenses incurred from the person or persons in default of the duty; or, on the application of the Lord Advocate the Court of Session may order specific performance of the duty.

Sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 25

This applies section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to the performance by education authorities of the duties imposed by sections 22, 23 and 25 of this Act.

Race Relations Act 1976, section 19

This applies section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to the performance by education authorities of the duties imposed by sections 17, 18 and 19 of this Act.

ROAD TRAFFIC

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, sections 70 and 85

The Secretary of State may direct a local authority to erect a traffic sign, or remove one or, on refusal, carry out the work and recover expense.

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, section 93

The Secretary of State may arrange the placing or removal of bollards or other obstructions on any roads leading into or on any non-trunk road and recover the costs from the local authority concerned.

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, Schedule 9, paragraph 4

The Secretary of State may require any local authority to make a traffic regulation or speed limit order or may prohibit the authority from making such orders. The Secretary of State may also on limited grounds make such orders himself.

HARBOURS

Harbours, Piers and Ferries (Scotland) Act 1937, section 15

The Secretary of State may serve notice on a harbour authority which has received assistance by way of grant or loan out of moneys provided by Parliament, to require it to carry out any particular operation that is necessary in order to maintain a marine work in an efficient condition and proper state of repair. Where the authority fails to carry out the work the Secretary of State may have it done and recover the cost from the authority. There is provision for appeal to the Sheriff.

Harbours Act 1964, section 15

The Secretary of State, with respect to a harbour owned by a local authority, may make a harbour revision order if he is satisfied that it ought to be made for the reconstituting and/or regulating of the procedure of the harbour authority. He can make the order despite the fact that no application to him for the making of it is received from the local authority who improve, maintain or manage the harbour.

AGRICULTURE

Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, section 12

The Secretary of State may by order empower any person to discharge any local authority rodent control function where he is satisfied that this function is not being satisfactory performed by the authority. He may recover from the local authority the cost incurred.

Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1958, section 10

The Secretary of State may require any local authority to furnish him with information necessary to enable him properly to discharge his functions under the Act. Anyone failing to comply would be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine.

Medicines Act 1968, section 109(2) and (3)

The Secretary of State may enforce regulations relating to the sale of animal feeding stuffs and also to their labelling and storage.

Agriculture Act 1970, section 67(8)

The Secretary of State may, if of the opinion that local authority enforcement is insufficient, appoint one or more inspectors to discharge any local authority's functions in relation to the protection of fertilizers and feedingstuffs. He may recover the costs from the local authority concerned.

Animal Health Act 1981, section 59(1)

The Secretary of State may order empower a named person to execute or enforce any of the provisions of the Animal Health Act 1981, or of an order made under the Act, where a local authority has failed to do so. Costs may be recovered from the local authority.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH MATTERS

Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897, sections 146 and 148

The Secretary of State may institute proceedings againts a local authority to compel them to do their duty with respect to the removal of nuisances.

Coast Protection Act 1949, section 29

The Secretary of State may cause an enquiry to be held if a coast protection authority is suspected of failing to take sufficient measures, and may make an order directing them to exercise their powers.

Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951, section 12(3)

The Secretary of State may direct a river purification board to delegate functions to a water authority.

Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951, section 26(7) and (8)

The Secretary of State may require river purification authority to make byelaws and may thereafter require the revocation of such byelaws if necessary. If the authority fails to comply the Secretary of State may himself revoke and make new byelaws as he considers necessary.

Food and Drugs (Scotland) Act 1956, section 55

If the Secretary of State after communication with a local authority is of the opinion that the authority have failed to exercise any of their functions under the Act or any regulations or orders made thereunder by him he may by order empower an

officer of his department to exercise or procure the exercise of that function. He may recover from the local authority the costs incurred.

Clean Air Act 1956, section 31

The Secretary of State may institute proceedings under sections 146 and 148 of the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 against a local authority to compel them to do their duty with respect to the removal of smoke nuisances.

Spray Irrigation (Scotland) Act 1964, section 1(2)

The Secretary of State may, in performance of his duty to promote the conservation of water etc, require a river purification board to make application for an order to control abstraction of water for the purpose of spray irrigation.

Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1965, section 5(1)

The Secretary of State may direct a river purification authority to vary or revoke conditions governing discharges and, if the authority fail to comply, may himself give notice of variation of revocation.

Clean Air Act 1968, section 8(4)

The Secretary of State may direct a local authority who have insufficiently exercised their smoke control powers to do so in such manner and within such period as he may specify.

Medicines Act 1968, section 109

The Secretary of State may enforce or secure the enforcement of the Act and regulations or orders made under it if, after making such inquiry as he thinks fit, he takes the view that any body which has a duty to enforce the provisions of the Act as set out in subsections 108(4) to (8) has failed to perform the duty.

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, section 45

The Secretary of State may cause a local inquiry to be held where a local authority is considered not to have discharged its health and safety functions correctly. If appropriate, he may then direct the authority to perform its enforcement functions.

Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978, sections 1(5) and (6) and section 3(9)

The Secretary of State may, following a local inquiry, require a local authority to provide a plan for the deposit of refuse where they have failed to do so.

Water (Scotland) Act 1980, section 11

The Secretary of State may, where it appears to him that a water authority or water development board has failed to undertake duties as required under the Act, direct the authority or board to remedy the default and, if they fail to comply, by order transfer the duties to another authority or board.

POLICE

Police Grant (Scotland) Order 1947 (SI 1659), Article 3 (Made under the Police (Scotland) Act 1967, section 32

The Secretary of State may withhold police grant in whole or part, permanently or for such time as he may determine, if he is not satisfied that the policy area is efficiently policed, that adequate co-operation is afforded by the police force to other police forces, that the police service is efficiently and properly maintained, equipped and administered, and that rates of pay and allowances of the force are as prescibed or approved by him.

Police (Scotland) Act 1967, section 11(2) and (4)

The Secretary of State may, if it appears to him expedient in the interests of public safety or order that a police force should be reinforced or receive other assistance to enable it to meet any special demand, direct the chief constable of another police force to provide such assistance as he may specify; and the Secretary of State may give directions as to the arrangements for dividing the costs of such assistance between the police authorities concerned.

Police (Scotland) Act 1967, section 12(3) and (5)

If it appears to the Secretary of State that any police functions can be more efficiently discharged by constables of two or more forces acting jointly, or that any premises, equipment or other material or facilities can with advantage be provided jointly for the police forces in two or more areas, he may after, considering any representations made by the parties concerned, direct those parties to enter into an agreement for these purposes; and he may determine the arrangements for apportioning the costs among the police authorities concerned.

Police (Scotland) Act 1967, section 20

If it appears to the Secretary of State that the expendiency in the interests of efficiency of making an amalgamation scheme for any police area should be considered, and no scheme satisfactory to him has been submitted to him by the police authorities concerned before such date as he may fix, he may by order make such a scheme.

FIRE SERVICES

Fire Services Act 1947, section 19 (as amended by section 7 of the Fire Services Act 1959)

The Secretary of State has the power to make a new establishment scheme if an authority's scheme is unsatisfactory.

Fire Services Act 1947, section 33 (as expanded by section 29 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971)

The Secretary of State may hold a public local inquiry into the manner in which an authority is discharging its functions under this Act and the Fire Precautions Act 1971, or the steps taken to deal with an individual fire.

Fire Services Act 1947, section 36

The Secretary of State has the power to make a new administration scheme for a combined area if the constituent authorities' scheme is unsatisfactory.

CIVIL DEFENCE

Civil Defence Act 1948, section 2(2)(c) (as applied by Civil Defence (General) (Scotland) Regulations 1949, Regulation 5)

The Secretary of State, where he is satisfied that a local authority has failed or has refused properly to discharge any of the civil defence functions conferred on it, may either empower himself to discharge those functions or authorise or require some other authority or person to do so (in either case in the name and at the expense of the defaulting authority).

The Civil Defence (Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 1953, Regulation 6

The Secretary of State may withhold, in whole or in part, permanently or for such time as he may determine, payment of civil defence grant if a local authority has, among other things, failed to perform its civil defence functions efficiently or failed to comply with any directions issued by him with which the authority is bound to comply under the Civil Defence Act 1948.

MISCELLANEOUS

Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965, section 7(8)

Where a local registration authority (a Regional or Islands Council) has failed to fill a vacancy in the office of district registrar after being required to do so by the Registrar General, the vacancy is to be filled by the Secretary of State on the application of the Registrar General.

Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, section 55

The Secretary of State may make byelaws in default of the local authority's complying with a direction to do so themselves within 3 months.

District Courts (Scotland) Act 1975, section 5(4)

The Secretary of State may, where it appears to him expedient to do so in order to avoid delays in the administration of justice in any district court, direct the local authority concerned to appoint a qualified person to act as a stipendiary magistrate in that court.

Licensing (Scotland) Act 1967, section 1(11)

If a Licensing Board is not elected at the time at which it ought to be elected, or an insufficient number of members is elected for a board the Secretary of State may by order provide for the holding of another election or elections for supplying such fault or deficiency in election at such times and in such manner as he may think expedient.

Representation of the People Act 1983, section 18(5)

The Secretary of State may direct returning officers to alter polling arrangements when the returning officer fails to provide polling arrangements to meet the reasonable requirements of electors, and may make the alterations himself if the returning officer fails to make them within a month of the directive having been given.

Police Operation, Blindwells, East Lothian

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Lothian and Borders police on the number of police officers and vehicles which were deployed at Blindwells, East Lothian, on the morning of 10 December; what was the cost of this police operation; and what was the purpose of the blocking of traffic on the Tranent/Meadowmill road on that occasion.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *620*]: I understand from the chief constable that up to a maximum of 174 officers and 16 vehicles were deployed at the scene where some 500 persons had gathered; that it is not possible for him to provide a separate cost for this particular policing operation; and that it was necessary to close the road to traffic for a period to prevent obstruction to the entrance to the Blindwells site and to permit the police to exercise operational control at the scene.

Selective Financial Assistance

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he has paid out in selective financial assistance to companies in the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy travel-to-work areas from 1979 onwards; and how many companies have received help.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *57*]: In the period from January 1979 to October 1984 inclusive payments of selective financial assistance totalling £7·43 million were made to 76 companies in the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy travel-to-work areas.

Police (Pay)

Mr. Willie Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current rates of basic pay for each rank in the police force; what additional emoluments are payable; and what were the comparable figures in each of the last five years expressed in cash terms and in annual percentage increases.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *253*]: The information is set out in the tables, the details about additional emoluments comprising the readily-available information in relation to 1 September 1979 and 1 December 1984 only.

Rates of basic police pay in Scotland

Table A

Rank	*As at 1 September 1979*		*From 1 September 1980*			*From 1 September 1981*			*From 1 September 1982*			*From 1 September 1983*			*From 1 September 1984*		
	Min.	*Max.*	*Average % increase*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*Average % increase*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*Average % increase*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*Average % increase*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*Average % increase*	*Min.*	*Max.*
Chief Constable	18,840	23,268	12·5	21,195	26,175	8	23,046	28,203	10·3	25,419	31,107	8·8	27,519	33,678	*	27,519	33,678
Deputy Chief Constable	15,072	18,615	12·5	17,502	20,943	10	19,602	22,794	10·3	21,621	25,143	8·8	23,949	27,222	*	23,949	27,222
Assistant Chief Constable	14,187	—	19·8	17,001	—	12·4	19,101	—	10·3	21,069	—	8·8	22,809	—	*	22,809	—
Chief Superintendent	12,258	13,257	21·3	14,868	16,050	13·2	16,830	18,150	10·3	18,564	20,004	7·7	20,124	21,483	4·8	21,090	22,506
Superintendent	11,124	12,015	21·3	13,494	14,565	13·2	15,276	16,482	10·3	16,848	18,174	7·7	18,102	19,698	4·8	18,972	20,640
Chief Inspector	8,058	8,967	21·3	9,774	10,875	13·2	11,064	12,309	10·3	12,204	13,578	8·4	13,230	14,718	5·1	13,944	15,513
Inspector	7,095	8,058	21·3	8,607	9,774	13·2	9,774	11,064	10·3	10,749	12,204	8·4	11,652	13,230	5·1	12,282	13,944
Sergeant	6,186	7,095	21·3	7,503	8,607	13·2	8,493	9,744	10·3	9,369	10,749	8·4	10,155	11,652	5·1	10,704	12,282
Constable	4,086	6,471	21·3	4,956	7,848	13·2	5,610	8,883	10·3	6,189	9,798	8·4	6,708	10,620	5·1	6,708	11,193

* Rates of pay for these ranks, as from 1 September 1984, are the subject of continuing negotiations within the Police Negotiating Board for the United Kingdom.

Table B

Additional emoluments payable to Police officers in Scotland

Type of Payment	*Annual rate (unless otherwise stated)*		*Percentage increase (1984 over 1979)*
	1 September 1979	*1 December 1984*	
Bicycle allowance	£4·25—£17	£10—£40	135
Dental expenses	In line with NHS charges		—
Detective duty and expenses	£518 (Superintendent ranks only)	£518	—
	£52 (below Superintendent rank)	£52	—
Distant islands allowance	Payment of travel expenses to mainland (maximum of 3 journeys)		—
Doghandlers' allowance	£288—£387 (depending on rank)	£492—£666	71—72
Extra duty*	No fixed rate (payable by authority for which duties are undertaken)		—
Language allowance	£84—£344 (depending on language(s))	£267—£1,370	218—298
Medical/optical expenses	Variable (cost of prescriptions; or treatment not available within the NHS which is prescribed by the force medical officer)		—
Motor vehicle allowance	Variable (depending on vehicle and user)		—
Officer held in reserve away from normal place of duty	Variable (according to circumstances)		—
Overtime, public holiday and rest day working	Variable (ranks below Superintendent)		—

Type of Payment	*Annual rate (unless otherwise stated)*		*Percentage increase (1984 over 1979)*
	1 September 1979	*1 December 1984*	
Plain clothes allowance	£120—£152 (depending on rank)	£165—£204	38—34
Promotion examination pass	£45	£45	—
Recurring escort duty*	No fixed rate (subject to approval by the Secretary of State)		—
Refreshment, subsistence and lodging	Variable (according to rank and length of period)		—
Removal allowance	Variable (according to rank and circumstances)		—
Rent allowance	Variable†		—
Search of badly decomposed corpses	£2·50 or £3·75 (single payment depending on type of search)	£10·35 or £15·50	314
Attendance at training course	£1·08 (per night)	£1·89 (per night)	75
Temporary salary	Variable (according to rank being covered temporarily)		—
Typewriter allowance	£4 (maximum)	£10 (maximum)	150
Uniform allowance	Variable (payable only to some senior ranks and varies according to rank and police authority)		—
Women' stockings allowance	£12	£25	108

* Not negotiated by the Police Negotiating Board for the United Kingdom.

† All police officers who are not provided with free accommodation are entitled to a rent allowance, the maximum limits of which are set bi-annually by individual police authorities subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 December 1984

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Research Assistants

Mr. Shersby asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will take steps to make it a requirement for research assistants and other staff employed by hon. Members serving on Select Committees to make an appropriate declaration of their intention to observe the confidentiality of any parliamentary papers which they may see in the course of their work.

Mr. Biffen: The Services Committee will shortly be considering a Sub-Committee report on a subject closely connected to that raised by my hon. Friend. If the Committee then makes a report to the House, an opportunity will no doubt arise for the discussion of my hon. Friend's proposal.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Field Walls

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost per metre of constructing a field wall using traditional materials; what would be the cost of constructing such a wall around a 10 hectare field; and what would be the net cost after payment of capital grant by his Department.

Mrs. Fenner: The cost of building a wall using traditional materials would vary greatly depending on a number of factors, which include the availability of materials, whether farm or contract labour is used and the nature of the site on which the work is to be carried out. For this reason it is not practical to provide the information sought. But the level of grant payable on eligible work of this kind would be 60 per cent. of the eligible cost in the less favoured areas and 30 per cent. in the lowlands.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many grant claims have been received by his Department in respect of the provision of field walls of traditional materials, and hedges, respectively; and what length walls and hedges have been provided under grant-aided schemes in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret the information requested is not available.

EC (Self-sufficiency)

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the degree of self-sufficiency in each of the major farm products in each of the 10 European Economic Community countries during the past five years.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is given in the following table for 1980 and the latest year for which estimates are available.

Self-Sufficiency—EC Member States

Per cent.

		Federal Republic of Germany	*France*	*Italy*	*Netherlands*	*BLEU*	*United Kingdom*	*Ireland*	*Denmark*	*Greece*	*EC*
Common wheat	1984-85*(a)	117	252	76	70	78	137	75	129	126	150
	1980-81	110	223	71	60	70	96	43	123	203	120
Barley	1984-85*(a)	107	197	53	28	86	169	117	130	100	132
	1980-81	93	182	41	35	70	130	109	102	98	114
Sugar†	1984-85*(a)	130	217	86	164	232	56	154	267	76	131
	1980-81	123	220	102	161	222	49	101	187	74	127
Vegetable fats and oils	1981-82	12	38	53	2	1	‡14	0	‡2	105	‡29
	1980-81	11	38	55	1	1	‡11	0	2	121	‡31
Of which:											
Olive oil	1983-84(d)	0	7	92	0	0	0	0	0	116	94
	1980-81	0	6	98	0	0	0	0	0	125	102
Wine‖(a)	1984-85*	49	132	148	0	8	..	0	0	113	116
	1980-81	31	113	165	0	2	..	0	0	118	116
Milk—butterfat(b)	1983	137	142	78	306	105	91	235	214	n.a.	•127
	1980	123	121	79	274	103	79	208	204	n.a.	•118
—solids not fat(b)	1983	142	122	92	117	106	117	231	118	n.a.	•123
	1980	137	124	74	128	133	114	175	131	n.a.	•120
Beef and veal	1984*(a)	115	116	59	181	113	90	570	317	35	106
	1980	106	111	63	141	108	84	655	351	46	103
Pigmeat	1983	87	82	75	252	149	(c)71	(a)105	401	(a)74	(a)102
	1980	88	83	71	240	160	65	133	352	92	100

		Federal Republic of Germany	France	Italy	Netherlands	BLEU	United Kingdom	Ireland	Denmark	Greece	EC
Sheep and goatmeat	1984*(a)	43	78	65	271	22	70	165	30	87	75
	1980	38	80	66	313	18	65	139	n.a.	95	74
Poultrymeat	1983	61	149	99	234	82	(c)97	¶93	224	¶100	¶112
	1980	62	126	99	296	85	99	102	231	103	107
Eggs	1983	72	104	93	301	124	98	76	104	99	103
	1980	73	100	93	309	138	98	79	101	101	101

Notes:

Figures for common wheat, barley, sugar, vegetable fats and oils, and wine relate to EC marketing years.

* Forecast.

† Sugar produced from imported cane sugar has not been included. Production figures include non-quota sugar which is not sold on the Community market but is exported without export refunds or is carried forward to the following season.

‡ EUROSTAT estimate.

‖ Excluding wine distilled under Community measures.

¶ 1982.

● EC9 (excludes Greece).

n.a. = not available.

.. = less than 0·5 per cent.

Sources:

EUROSTAT, unless otherwise stated.

(a) EC Commission

(b) Milk Marketing Board

(c) MAFF (estimate)

(d) Olive Oil Council

Agricultural Land (Drainage)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the area of agricultural land where the existing drainage system is more than 50 years old and more than 100 years old, respectively.

Mrs. Fenner: We do not collect information on the area of agricultural land which is drained, and so I regret that I cannot provide the estimate requested. I understand, however, it has been estimated that by 1880 between 4·85 and 5·7 million hectares had been drained and that, by 1939, 2·17 million hectares were still being effectively drained by old drainage systems.

Eggs

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has as to the cost of egg production in France and the Netherlands at a convenient date each month since December 1983;

(2) if he will list the cost of egg production according to the production cost index at a convenient date each month since December 1983.

Mr. MacGregor: Monthly data on costs of egg production in member states is not available. But a comparison of production costs in a number of member states (including England and Wales, France and the Netherlands) was published in the report of the Agriculture Committee's inquiry into the effect of feedingstuff prices on the United Kingdom pig and poultry industries (pages 203-204 of Volume II of the Second Report 1983-84 Session). Following is an extract from the relevant table.

	£ per 100 eggs
England and Wales (1982)	3·65
Denmark (1982-83)	3·43
France (1982)	3·17
Germany (1982)	4·37
Netherlands (1982-83)	3·54
Ireland (1982)	4·96

For the reasons explained in the report, considerable care has to be taken in drawing any conclusions from these comparative production costs.

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the price of eggs per dozen according to the egg price index on a convenient date each month since December 1983.

Mr. MacGregor: The price of size 4 eggs, as shown by the retail food index, since December 1983 is as follows:

Date (1984)	Pence per dozen
10 January	81·6
14 February	82·4
13 March	83·7
10 April	87·6
15 May	88·5
12 June	85·4
17 July	82·1
14 August	81·3
11 September	79·5
16 October	79·6
13 November	77·9

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total number of chicks placed for egg laying in the United Kingdom each month since December 1983.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Statistical month (4 or 5 weeks)	Millions of chicks
1984	
January (5 weeks)	3·51
February	2·82
March	2·55
April (5 weeks)	3·63
May	2·74
June	2·77
July (5 weeks)	2·88
August	2·12
September	2·51
October (5 weeks)	3·09

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the total of egg imports from France each month since December 1983;

(2) if he will list the total of egg imports from the Netherlands each month since December 1983;

(3) if he will list the totals of egg imports into the United Kingdom each month since December 1983.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Imports of eggs in shell

1984	No. of boxes (each of 360 eggs) Imports from France	Imports from the Netherlands	Imports from all sources
January	26,094	29,486	66,383
February	21,730	37,264	74,000
March	28,458	74,772	115,383
April	49,378	38,503	91,056
May	68,700	134,789	204,472
June	37,686	74,897	113,981
July	17,725	51,850	74,961
August	44,433	77,805	123,753
September	16,392	45,869	62,778
October	3,486	56,244	61,208

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received alleging that French and Dutch eggs are being exported to the United Kingdom at less than the cost of production, packaging and transportation.

Mr. MacGregor: Earlier in the year I received some complaints about the prices of eggs imported from other member states. There is a free market for eggs within the European Community so that prices, at any point in time, depend on the balance between supply and demand and not on production costs. There was no evidence that imported eggs were on sale here at prices below those in the country of origin.

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the powers available to him to control the importing of French and Dutch eggs into the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: There is a free market for eggs within the European Community. But the Importation of Animal Products and Poultry Products Order 1980 (S.I. 1980, No. 14), as amended, provides powers to control the landing of eating eggs in order to protect animal health. Further, imported eggs are subject to the Imported Food Regulations, which contain measures for the protection of public health, and to the EC Egg Marketing Standards Regulations.

Stevioside

Mr. Neale asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what food or drink products the use of stevioside is currently permitted.

Mrs. Fenner: None.

WALES

House Building Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses were completed in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector in Wales in each year since 1978; and what is the estimate for 1985.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of dwellings completed in the public and private sectors in the years 1978 to 1984 are as follows. No estimate is available for 1985.

Number of completed dwellings

	Public	Private
1978	5,547	7,091
1979	4,351	6,914
1980	4,622	5,727
1981	4,027	4,909
1982	2,672	4,781
*1983	2,248	5,049
‡1984	2,500	5,700

* Provisional.
† Estimate.

Appointments

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* the names, occupations and political affiliations where known of those people he has appointed to all the statutory bodies and the principal committees answerable to and appointed by him, giving salaries and payments where relevant.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Details of the numbers of people appointed solely by me to executive bodies, advisory bodies and health authorities in Wales and to the Board of the Welsh water authority are included in "Public Bodies 1984" published by HMSO on 18 December 1984. The publication includes details of remuneration where appropriate.

I will write to the hon. Gentleman with details of the names of those appointed and will place a copy of my letter in the Library. Information about appointees occupations could only be provided at disproportionate cost. My Department does not keep a record of appointees political affiliations. In making appointments it is my policy to select the best person for the job bearing in mind all factors relevant to the post.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of individuals that he has appointed to public bodies in Wales during the past year, together with individuals appointed to public bodies in Wales which he has *(a)* made jointly with other Ministers and *(b)* has been consulted about.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and will place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications for *(a)* discretionary and *(b)* mandatory home improvement grants are still awaiting payment or processing for each of the relevant Welsh local authorities.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of *(a)* discretionary and *(b)* mandatory grant applications still awaiting approval are shown in the table. The number of grants applications which have received approval but still await payment is not available by local authority.

	(Imp/Con and Repair Grants) Discretionary	*(Intermediate and Special Grants) Mandatory*	*Total*
Clwyd			
Alyn and Deeside	390	20	410
Colwyn	232	8	240
Delyn	344	49	393
Glyndwr	501	61	562
Rhuddlan	93	2	95
Wrexham Maelor	501	8	509
Dyfed			
Carmarthen	771	27	789
Ceredigion	546	66	612
Dinefwr	560	16	576
Llanelli	414	3	417
Preseli	233	14	247
South Pembrokeshire	405	7	412
Gwent			
Blaneau Gwent	7,813	356	8,169
Islwyn	1,773	79	1,852
Monmouth	653	0	653
Newport	3,942	429	4,371
Torfaen	3,752	49	3,801
Gwynedd			
Aberconwy	133	2	135
Arfon	1,050	19	1,069
Dwyfor	824	24	848
Meirionnydd	970	45	1,015
Ynys Mon	875	48	923
Mid Glamorgan			
Cynon Valley	2,984	215	3,199
Merthyr Tydfil	2,610	130	2,740
Ogwr	1,655	143	1,798
Rhondda	4,952	111	5,063
Rhymney Valley	4,365	0	4,365
Taff-Ely	2,564	1	2,565
Powys			
Brecknock	1,162	33	1,195
Montgomery	1,034	80	1,114
Radnor	600	10	610
South Glamorgan			
Cardiff	9,186	493	9,679
Vale of Glamorgan	2,058	22	2,080
West Glamorgan			
Afan	1,309	5	1,314
Lliw Valley	439	33	472
Neath	2,076	0	2,076
Swansea	3,060	340	3,400
Wales Total	66,829	2,948	69,777

Housing Benefit Recipients

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of all those in receipt of standard housing benefit in Wales with an income *(a)* above the needs allowance and *(b)* below the needs of allowance, have children; and, in each case, what percentage of those below pensionable age have children.

Mr. Whitney: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that this information is not available.

ENERGY

Oil

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions in the past five years the spot price for crude oil has exceeded the term price.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The spot price of United Kingdom continental shelf crude oil has exceeded the term price over 11 periods in the past five years for a total duration of approximately 98 weeks.

Plutonium (Military Use)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if Her Majesty's Government remain satisfied that it is the policy of the United States Government not to use plutonium supplied by the United Kingdom for military purposes other than in weapons;

(2) what is the latest information he has received about the reports to Congress by the United States Energy Secretary concerning the purposes to which plutonium supplied by the United Kingdom may be put in the United States.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the right hon. Member on 2 July 1984 at column *36*.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy what further representations he has received from the general secretary of the Electrical Power Engineers Association about the purposes to which plutonium exported by the United Kingdom is put in the United States; and what reply he is sending.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have arranged for Mr. Lyons' latest letter and my reply to be placed in the Library.

Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list for each year since 1979 *(a)* the number and rank of people employed by and *(b)* the total expenditure of the Atomic Energy Authority constabulary.

Mr. Goodlad: The information is as follows:

(a) The strength of the Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary from 1979 to 1984 broken down by grades is as follows:

Rank	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Chief Constable	1	1	1	1	1	1
Deputy Chief Constable	1	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Chief Constable	—	—	—	—	1	1
Superintendent	1	2	2	3	1	2
Chief Inspector	8	8	8	9	10	10
Inspector	19	21	22	20	20	21
Sergeant	73	76	77	88	92	93
Constable	413	480	480	491	509	517
Total	516	589	591	613	635	646

(b) The total expenditure on the Atomic Energy Authority constabulary since 1979 is as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	4·4
1980-81	6·2
1981-82	6·9
1982-83	7·7
1983-84	8·8

Chapelcross Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the future of the Chapelcross nuclear power station.

Mr. Goodlad: I am advised by British Nuclear Fuels plc that it expects that whilst the nuclear power station at Chapelcross continues to be an economic and reliable supplier of electricity, and its continued operation is approved by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, its operational life could be extended into the next decade.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University Degree Courses

Mr. Fairbairn asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the average cost to public funds of a university degree course in Scotland;

(2) what is the average cost to public funds of a university PhD course in Scotland;

(3) what is the average cost to public funds of a university degree course;

(4) what is the average cost to public funds of a university PhD course.

Mr. Brooke: It is not possible to identify separately the costs of courses for undergraduates and postgraduates, nor to identify a precise share of the cost met from public funds. Approximate average annual institutional expenditure per student in the academic year 1982-83, the latest year for which firm figures are available, was as follows:

Universities	*£*
England and Wales	4,670
Scotland	4,580
Great Britain	4,660

These figures include expenditure on research from general income, but exclude capital expenditure and expenditure on pensions payable from general income. About 95 per cent. of the expenditure for home students underlying the unit costs comes from public funds. In the academic year 1983-84, 70 per cent. of all full-time home undergraduates in Scotland were on courses of 4 years or more, compared with 28 per cent. in England and Wales. The average length of undergraduate courses in England and Wales is 3·4 years and in Scotland is 3·8 years.

Mr. Fairbairn asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many students obtained degrees in politics, philosophy and economics at universities in 1983; and what proportion this represented of the total university student population;

(2) how many students obtained degrees in politics, philosophy and economics at Scottish universities in 1983; and what proportion this represented of the total university student population in Scotland.

Mr. Brooke: The available information is as follows:

University first degrees awarded: 1983

	*PPE**		*Philosophy*		*Economics*		*All full-time and sandwich undergraduate level students 1983-84*
	Number	*Per cent.†*	*Number*	*Per cent.†*	*Number*	*Per cent.†*	
Great Britain	288	0·4	457	0·6	2,125	2·9	291,722
Scotland	—	—	49	0·5	220	2·2	44,849

* Philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford and Keele Universities
† Percentages are of all first degrees awarded in 1983

Information about the number of degrees in politics is not readily available.

Minimum Grants (Abolition)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what response he has sent to the chairman of the Federation of Conservative Students in answer to the letter he received from him earlier this month relating to the proposed abolition of minimum grants.

Sir Keith Joseph: My response was as follows:

M. H. Glendening Esq.
National Chairman
The Federation of
Conservative Students
32 Smith Square
Westminster
London SWIP 3HH 14 December 1984

Dear Mr. Glendening,

Thank you for your letter of 5 December. You will have seen the outcome of last week's events — and you will have observed that there is to be a review of students finance — which should provide an opportunity for a number of options to be considered.

Sincerely
Keith Joseph

Astronomical Observatories (South Africa)

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with the Science and Engineering Research Council about its funding for astronomical observatories in South Africa.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Teachers (Appointments)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department issues any advice or guidelines to local education authorities concerning the appointment of teachers who have previously been convicted of any criminal offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department issued administrative memorandum 3/82 on 6 September 1982 to local education authorities and other bodies involved in the appointment of teachers. This sets out the procedures for dealing with cases of misconduct, including criminal offences, by teachers and others who work with children, such as residential school staff, youth and community workers. My right hon. Friend has powers to bar such persons and when he does so details are given in confidence to local education authorities and all other bodies concerned. Procedures are kept under review to ensure they are as effective as possible and the Department will be taking part in the review of arrangements for making available information about criminal backgrounds announced on 19 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

University Arts Degree Courses (Rejections)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of secondary school sixth formers who applied for an arts degree university course for the academic year 1984-85 received notifications of rejection.

Mr. Brooke: Information on university applicants from school sixth forms is not readily available. In 1983, the latest year for which information is available, 47 per cent. of all home candidates who applied for a university arts degree through the UCCA were not accepted for any degree course.

Students (Tuition Fees)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students of British nationality are meeting the full costs of their tuition fees and accommodation from their own personal resources at both undergraduate and postgraduate level during the present academic year.

Mr. Brooke: Information relating to nationality is not available. In 1982-83, the latest year for which information is available, the number of full-time students at British universities, paying fees at the home rate, who were self-supporting was as follows:

	Numbers	*per cent.*
Undergraduates	7,118	3·0
Postgraduates	5,206	16·7

Comparable information for public sector higher education students is not available.

Student Grants

Mr. Tracey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Surbiton on 10 December, he is now able to announce the time scale and terms of reference of the review of the student support system.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements are made, in calculating residual income for the purposes of parental contribution for student grant, in respect of personnel serving in Her Majesty's Forces who are living in married quarters and pay rent or have deductions from their salary in lieu of rent, and do not have mortgages.

Mr. Brooke: No account is taken of any rent payments or deductions from salary in lieu of rent in determining residual income. No special arrangements are made in determining residual income in respect of any occupational groups including members of Her Majesty's Forces.

School Meals

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will convert the expenditure figures on school meals in table 2:10 of the Government's Expenditure Plans 1984-85 to 1986-87 to 1983-84 constant prices.

Mr. Dunn: The information is as follows. 1983-84 constant prices are obtained by adjusting the cash figures from table 2:10 of the Government's Expenditure Plans (Cmnd. 9143) by the latest forecasts for the GDP deflator at market prices.

	Cash	*1983-84 constant prices*
	£ million	*£ million*
1978-79	376	639
1979-80	409	594

	Cash £ million	1983-84 constant prices £ million
1980-81	391	479
1981-82	390	434
1982-83	404	422
1983-84	414	414
1984-85	257	245
1985-86	270	247
1986-87	270	237

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children received, or are expected to receive, school meals in each year from 1984-85 to 1986-87; and what proportion of the school population this represents.

Mr. Dunn: In October 1983, the latest date for which firm census figures are available, 3,481,837 children received school meals; this represented 51·4 per cent. of the pupils in school on the day of the census. The figures for October 1984 will be available shortly. The number of children receiving school meals in future years will depend upon a number of variable factors and cannot be estimated precisely.

Special Schools

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will convert the special schools recurrent expenditure figures in table 2:10 of the Government's Expenditure Plans 1984-85 to 1986-87 to 1983-84 constant prices.

Mr. Dunn: The information is as follows. 1983-84 constant prices are obtained by adjusting the cash figures from table 2:10 of the Government's Expenditure Plans (Cmnd. 9143) by the latest forecast for the GDP deflator at market prices.

	Cash £ million	1983-84 constant prices £ million
1978-79	214	363
1979-80	249	362
1980-81	309	378
1981-82	347	386
1982-83	385	402
1983-84	399	399
1984-85	385	368
1985-86	400	365
1986-87	410	360

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total value of mortgage interest relief forgone as tax income by the Inland Revenue, and the average amount of relief received by each mortgagor, in England and in London, for 1984-85.

Mr. Moore: The latest estimates are as follows:

	Mortgage Interest Relief	
	Total cost £ million	Cost per mortgagor £
London	480	620
England	3,100	500
United Kingdom	3,500	500

Personal Taxation

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the trend in the level of direct taxation on earned incomes since 1979; and if there is any correlation between this trend and changes in the economic performance of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moore: Income tax has fallen as a proportion of earnings for the great majority of earners since 1979. Economic performance is affected by a number of factors and it is difficult to isolate the effect of one particular variable. However, a lower burden of income tax should, by improving incentives and thereby encouraging work, risk-taking, and enterprise contribute to improved economic performance.

Superannuation Fund (Staff)

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the size of the staff at the superannuation fund's office at the latest available date in comparison with five years ago.

Mr. Moore: The staff in post at the superannuation fund's office was 280 at 1 December 1984. The figure at 1 December 1979 was 267.

Pension Funds (Taxation)

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the yield to the Exchequer in 1985-86 of a 30 per cent. tax on the investment income of occupational pension funds is estimated to be lost by reduced corporation tax payments, assuming the reduced income of funds is made good solely by employers.

Mr. Moore: This would depend on the levels of income of the occupational pension funds and the tax status of the corresponding companies in 1985-86. But a very tentative estimate based on 1984-85 estimates of pension fund income and company profits is that about 20 per cent. of the yield might be lost.

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the real rate of interest each quarter from the beginning of 1979.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There is no precise practical definition of real interest rates. An article in the December 1983 Bank of England *Quarterly Bulletin* discusses some of the issues.

Dual Resident Companies (Taxation)

Mr. Freeman asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the effect on the flow of direct investment from the United States of America into the United Kingdom of his draft proposals to change the basis of taxation of dual resident companies.

Mr. Moore: I do not expect these proposals to have any significant effect on the flow of inward investment from the United States.

EC (Contributions)

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* an updated version of table 1 of the Sixth Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation showing in respect of the United Kingdom's contributions to the European Economic Community the figures for 1983, and the estimate for 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information for the calendar year 1983 and then for the first three-quarters of 1984 is given in the following table. Information concerning the payments and receipts for the final quarter of 1984 are not yet fully available.

Payments	*VAT Own Resources/ GNP-based Financial Contributions*	*Sugar and Isoglucose Levies*	*Agricultural Levies*	*Customs Duties*	*Total Gross Payments*
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(5)*
1983	1,669	43	188	1,075	2,975
1/1/84-30/9/1984	1,283	38	130	907	2,358

Reciepts	*EAGGF*	*Regional Develop-ment Fund*	*Social Fund*	*Other receipts*	*Total receipts*	*Net Payments Before UK Refunds (5-10)*	*Refunds*	*Net Payments after Refunds*
	(6)	*(7)*	*(8)*	*(9)*	*(10)*			
1983	1,082	139	128	172	1,521	1,454	807	647
1/1/84-30/9/1984	957	115	244	137	1,453	905	*NIL*	905

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will compare current and capital local expenditure in 1978-79 with 1983-84, in actual and percentage terms.

Mr. Peter Rees: Local authority expenditure figures for Great Britain were published in the 1984 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143). The figures requested are:

	1978-79 £ million	*1983-84 £ million*	*Percentage increase*
Local authority current expenditure (Great Britain)	14,102	28,410	101·5
Local authority capital expenditure (Great Britain	3,599	3,829	6·4
Total	17,701	32,239	82·1

The figures for 1983-84 will be updated in the next Public Expenditure White Paper. The capital expenditure figures will be about £400 million higher, as announced in Cmnd. 9323 (Cash limits 1983-84, provisional outturn). Capital expenditure figures in the White Paper are expressed net of sales of council houses and other assets, which have grown considerably since 1978-79.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total Government expenditure for 1983 and 1984; and what percentage of gross domestic product this represents for those years.

Mr. Peter Rees: The 1984 "Autumn Statement" showed estimated outturn for the public expenditure planning total in 1983-84 of £120·3 billion and in 1984-85 of nearly £128 billion. This represents about 42½ per cent. of GDP in each year.

VAT Office (South Shields)

Dr. David Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the value added tax office in South Shields.

Mr. Hayhoe: Customs and Excise has reviewed the organisation and location of its VAT offices and proposals are being discussed with the Civil Service trade unions including a proposal to close this office.

Workplace Nurseries

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many other member states of the European Economic Community tax the benefits of workplace nurseries.

Mr. Moore: The tax treatment of specific benefits-in-kind varies from country to country. As far as I am aware, however, only the Federal Republic of Germany specifically exempts by law the benefit of employer subsidised nurseries from tax.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will defer collection, without liability to back tax, of tax on workplace nurseries until a test case has clarified the relevant law.

(2) how many employers have been approached for details of their workplace nurseries following the decision to tax employees on the benefits from such nurseries.

(3) how many individuals are or have been the subject of personal tax claims in respect of workplace nursery benefits.

(4) how many individuals have been asked for arrears of tax to cover nursery benefits in previous years.

Mr. Moore: No. I am advised that the law is quite clear on this point: the benefit that directors and certain employees (currently those earning at a rate of £8,500 a year or more) receive from employer-subsidised nurseries has been liable to tax since legislation first introduced by

the then Labour Government in 1948. I regret that the detailed information requested on the number of employers and individuals concerned is not kept centrally.

EEC (Gross Domestic Product)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for the last eight six-monthly periods for which figures are available, for each member state of the European Economic Community and for the European Economic Community as a whole (i) increase in nominal gross domestic product, (ii) increase in gross domestic product output volume, (iii) increase in gross domestic product price deflator, (iv) seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment, (v) surplus in trading goods and (vi) surplus in invisible goods.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Average Wages

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the national average wage in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, and the tax threshold for (a) a single person and (b) a married couple; and if he will show (a) and (b) as a percentage of the national average wage for each of those years.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Privatised Public Corporations

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for each of the public corporations privatised during the period 1979 to 1984 *(a)* the number of shareholders by size band of holding immediately after flotation and *(b)* the same information at each succeeding 31 December.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an update of the table on shareholdings in privatised public corporations given in reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 29 July, *Official Report*, columns 725-8.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for each of the public corporations privatised in the period 1979 to 1984 (i) the gross proceeds from flotation or sale, (ii) the prior claims on such proceeds to meet contingent liabilities such as underfunded pension schemes, (iii) commissions, fees, advertising expenses and so on paid to merchant bankers and other advisers and (iv) the net proceeds accruing to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of merchant banks which have performed work either for the Government in the process of privatising public corporations, or for the public corporations themselves, giving the total sums paid to them from public funds, analysed by the particular privatisation involved and the nature of the expense such as fees and underwriting commissions.

Mr. Moore: A table showing the merchant banks who have advised the Government or acted as underwriters in the major privatisations to date was given in reply to the hon. Member's earlier question. This brought up to date the information given in reply to the hon.Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on 3 April 1984.

My earlier reply to the hon. Member also gave the total cost of the fees and commissions paid to the firms listed, for each privatisation. It is not our practice to disclose the value of individual contracts between Departments and their advisers.

The appointment of advisers by the companies concerned is a matter for them, not the Government.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the limitations on the size of non-Government individual shareholdings written into the articles of association of privatised public corporations are not breached, whether through the use of nominee shareholdings or through individuals acting in concert.

Mr. Moore: Where a limitation on the size of individual shareholdings appears in a company's articles of association, it is for the company to see to its enforcement. The Companies Act 1981 requires disclosure of individual shareholdings in a public company above 5 per cent. at 1 per cent. intervals thereafter, and gives such companies extensive powers to investigate the ownership of their shares. Failure to provide information requested under the relevant provisions of the Act is a criminal offence and provides grounds for an application to the court disenfranchising all the shares in question. In addition the Department of Trade and Industry have power to investigate the ownership of shares under the Companies Act 1948.

EC (Economic and Financial Statistics)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for the last eight six-monthly periods for which figures are available, for each member state and for the European Economic Community as a whole: index of rate of return on capital; index of total personal income before tax; index of total disposable income; personal savings ratio; tax as a proportion of wage income for the lower quartile; tax as a proportion of wage income for the middle quartile; tax as a proportion of wage income for the upper quartile; tax as a proportion of wage income for the mean income; tax as a proportion of income for the median income; public expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product; degree of capacity utilisation in industry; gross fixed investment as a percentage of gross domestic product of *(a)* private sector, and *(b)* public sector, gross domestic fixed capital formation of (i) a private sector, (ii) public sector, gross domestic fixed capital formation in *(a)* private dwellings, *(b)* public dwellings, *(c)* plant and machinery, *(d)* other new buildings and works, index of output per person employed in (i) the whole economy, (ii) production industries, (iii) manufacturing industries.

Mr. Moore: No. The information requested could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Taxation Allowances

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates would be the cost in 1985-86 of *(a)* indexing married and single personal allowances, *(b)* increasing married and single personal allowances at twice the rate of inflation, *(c)* increasing the married man's tax allowance by the rate of inflation, *(d)* indexing the single person's tax allowance by the rate of inflation and *(e)* providing a tax allowance to spouses not in receipt of income equal to 10 per cent., 20 per cent., 30 per cent., 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. of the single person's allowance.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

National Insurance Contributions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to remove tax relief on national insurance contributions from employers and employees.

Mr. Moore: Employees do not receive relief from tax on national insurance contributions. Employers do receive tax relief on their contributions. I have no plans to alter this position.

Uniform Traveller Allowances

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government support the EEC proposal for uniform traveller allowances for day trippers across national borders.

Mr. Lawson: It is not clear which proposal the right hon. Member has in mind but if he will send me further particulars, I will write to him.

Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, for each decile group in the income distribution, he will publish information showing the amount of taxes paid as a proportion of gross income broken down between (i) direct taxes, (ii) indirect taxes and (iii) all taxes for the most recent year or tax year available; and whether he will also show the average level of gross income in each of the income groups specified.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 December 1984]: Information of this kind based on the 1983 family expenditure survey is published regularly in *Economic Trends*. The latest article with data for 1982 appeared in *Economic Trends* number 361 (November 1983). The next article entitled "The Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Household incomes 1983" will appear in *Economic Trends* number 374 (December 1984) to be published in the middle of January 1985.

Pensioners (Lump Sum Payments)

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue in 1985-86 from taxing that part of the lump sum taken on retirement in 1985-86 accruing to members of pension schemes from contributions after April 1985.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 December 1984]: The Revenue would depend, amongst other things, on the rate at which tax was charged and the rules for calculating that part of each lump sum accruing from contributions after 1985. However, any yield in 1985-86 is likely to be small.

Privatisation (Fees and Commissions)

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* updated figures for fees paid, including fees to auditors in respect of the first share issues for Amersham International Ltd., Associated British Ports, British Aerospace, British Railways Board Hotels, Britoil, Cable and Wireless and the National Freight Corporation and *(b)* all the fees and commissions paid to primary underwriters, sub-underwriters, financial advisers, legal advisers, auditors and stockbrokers in respect of the second Cable and Wireless issue, the second Associated British Ports issue, Enterprise Oil, Sealink, Jaguar, British Telecom and the 1979 and 1983 BP issues; and if he will name each firm concerned.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *122*]: Details of the primary underwriters, sub-underwriters, financial advisers, legal advisers and stockbrokers appointed for the sales listed in the first part of the question were given in my reply to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on 3 April 1984. In addition W. Greenwell and Co. offered financial advice for the Amersham International, Cable and Wireless (1981) and Associated British Ports (1983) sales. The names of the accountants who acted as auditors in the sales covered in that reply together with revised updated totals of fees and commissions paid, are as follows:

[Table 1]

The main firms involved under each of the headings specified for the sales listed in the second part of the question, together with the overall total of fees and commissions paid, are as follows:

[Table 2]

The information and figures given do not include advice paid for by the companies being privatised which is not a matter for the Government. It is not the practice to disclose the value of individual contracts between Departments and their advisers. No advisers were retained by the Government in the disposal of British Rail hotels.

Table 1

	Amersham International	*Associated British Ports (1983)*	*British Aerospace*	*Britoil*	*Cable & Wireless (1981)*	*National Freight Company**
Companies Auditors	Coopers & Lybrand	Price, Waterhouse	Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.	Thompson McLintock	Deloitte, Haskins & Sells	Ernst & Whinney
Revised Total Fee/Commissions (£'000 including VAT)	1,483	1,827	4,239	11,257	5,374	265

* Share placing with a management and employees consortium.

Table 2

Cable & Wireless (1983)	*Associated British Ports (1984)*	*Enterprise Oil*	*Sealink†*	*Jaguar‡*	*British Telecom*	*British Petroleum (1979)*	*British Petroleum (1983)*
COMPANIES							
Primary Underwriters							
Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. Baring Bros. & Co. Ltd. J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd. Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd.	J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd. Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.	Kleinwort, Benson Ltd Morgan, Grenfell & Co. J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd. S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd.	n/a		Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. Barclays Merchant Bank Ltd. Charterhous Japhet plc Robert Fleming & Co. Ltd. Hill, Samuel & Co. Ltd. Lloyds Bank International Ltd. Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd. S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd. Baring Bros. & Co. Ltd. County Bank Ltd. Hambros Bank Ltd. Lazard Bros & Co. Ltd. Samuel Montagu & Co. Ltd. N. M. Rothschild & Sons Ltd. J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.	S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd. Robert Fleming & Co. Ltd. Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. Lazard Bros & Co. Ltd. Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd. J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.	S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd. Robert Fleming & Co. Ltd. Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. Lazard Bros & Co. Ltd. Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd. J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.
Sub-underwriters							
Various*	Various*	Various*	n/a		n/a¶	Various*	Various*
Financial Advisors							
Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.*	J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.	Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. Wood, Mackenzie & Co.	Hill, Samuel & Co. Ltd. W. Greenwell & Co	J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.	Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.	‖	‖
Legal Advisers							
Freshfields Linklaters & Paines Speechly Bircham	Freshfields Linklaters & Paines Slaughter & May	Freshfields Allen & Overy	n/a		Linklaters & Paines	Freshfields Linklaters & Paines	Freshfields Linklaters & Paines
Auditors							
Deloitte, Haskins & Sells	Price, Waterhouse	Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.	n/a		Coopers & Lybrand	Ernst & Whinney	Ernst & Whinney
Stockbrokers							
Mullens & Co. Cazenove & Co. James Capel & Co. Rowe & Pitman	W. Greenwell & Co. Cazenove & Co. Kitcat & Aitken	Cazenove & Co. De Zoete & Bevan	n/a		Hoare, Govett Ltd Cazenove & Co. De Zoete & Bevan Scrimgeour, Kemp-Gee & Co.	Mullens, & Co. Cazenove & Co. Hoare Govett Rowe & Pitman Scrimgeour, Kemp-Gee & Co.	Mullens & Co. Cazenove & Co. Hoare Govett Rowe & Pitman Scrimgeour, Kemp-Gee & Co.
Total Fee/Commissions (£'000 including VAT)							
5,017	1,128	9,044■	38	‡	107,285●	5,218	9,388

* The Bank of England was jointly responsible with Kleinwort, Benson for making the sale arrangements and providing advice.
† Trade sale.
‡ The sale of Jaguar was conducted by BL plc who appointed advisers. Details of the appointments and the total cost are a matter for the Company. Only one firm was appointed to advise the Government, it is not the practice to disclose fees paid to individual firms.
‖ In both BP sales, the Bank of England was responsible on the Government's behalf for making the sale arrangements and providing advice.
¶ The United Kingdom offer was placed with institutional investors ("Priority Applicants"). The cost of the commissions payable to Priority Applicants is included in the total.
● Estimate: final accounts are not yet available.
■ Provisional: final bills not all yet received.
• Too numerous to list.
n/a=Not available.

Tax Allowances and Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in real terms in *(a)* tax allowances since the temporary 1979-80 rates introduced by the Finance Act 1979 and *(b)* child benefit since April 1979, specifying in each case any assumptions used.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *64*]: Because of the changes introduced in the June 1979 Budget, a comparison of the kind requested would not be appropriate. However, during 1978-79, child support for a family paying tax at the basic rate with a child under 11 averaged £3.20 per week. In 1984-85 it will be £6.63 per week—an increase in real terms of about 17·br per cent. Over the same period, personal allowances have increased in real terms by about 16 per cent.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter about the Ethiopian famine from the Minister for Overseas Development to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, dated 11 December, following the answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *425-26*.

Mr. Raison: The text is as follows:

The Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) say that they have no detailed mortality figures for famine or famine-related diseases, due to the communications difficulties and the impossibility of determining the situation on the ground in large parts of the country. Apparently, the only way to collect reliable statistics would be to canvass each peasants' association, which is regarded as an impossible task given other urgent calls on resources and time.

We understand the following mortality statistics are available for November from certain feeding centres:

(a) Korem: Save the Children Fund (SCF) report November average daily death rate of 28 from camp of 30,000 people. Rate had been 100 per day in October, of which 60 per cent. was due to measles epidemic.

(b) Bati: RRC report average death rate of 100 per day from centre of some 17,000 people.

(c) Mekele: The International Committee of the Red Cross report average rate of 30-40 deaths per day in the feeding centre which can take up to 600 children. Relief workers in Mekele say the situation has been improving steadily since about mid-November with greater and more regular food deliveries.

The RRC emphasise that these statistics can only demonstrate the rough magnitude of the problem. In areas without feeding centres the death rate is likely to be higher, ad probably rising, as compared with some established feeding centres where it seems generally to have been falling during November. But some voluntary agencies report the situation in northern Shewa and southern Welo is rapidly deteriorating, while the situation at Mile and Asalta in eastern Welo is also bad. World Vision report feeding 4,500 malnourished children at Alamata in November and providing medical assistance to 6,000 people in Lalibela area in the same period.

During my visit it was clear that the massive relief operation now under way — to which the RAF detachment and the British voluntary agencies are making such a significant contribution — has begun to alleviate the problem in many famine areas. In no small measure this is due to the achievement of the RRC in dramatically improving the handling capacity at the port of Assab; and to more effective coordination both between donors and with the Ethiopian authorities.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement updating the information contained in his earlier replies to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, *Offical Report*, 4 December, column *135*, and 3 December, column *14*, concerning grain supplies and supplementary food and edible oil requirements in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: On 4 December, the European Council pledged that the Community and its member states would provide 1·2 million tonnes of grain to countries in Africa affected by famine before the next harvest; and the President of the United States of America recently announced the release of 300,000 tonnes from the US strategic grain stockpile for the same purpose. It is not yet possible to translate these pledges into a timetable for deliveries to Ethiopia or any other specific country.

Recent reports of supplementary food and edible oil requirements in Ethiopia have varied but on 11 December the United Nations Co-ordinator for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia estimated them to be 100,000 tonnes and 30,000 tonnes respectively, over the next twelve months.

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further help he proposes to provide for those affected by the drought in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: I am making available £250,000 each to Save the Children Fund, Christian Aid and War on Want. I am arranging for the specific uses of each allocation to be settled with these agencies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Mental Hospitals)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were committed to hospital from prison under section 37 of the Mental Health Act 1983 and 1984; how many returned to prison; and how many of those stayed in prison until release;

(2) if he is satisfied with the current situation regarding persons committed to hospital under section 37 of the Mental Health Act who are kept instead in prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I assume that the hon. member is referring to the number of people detained in prison on remand pending trial or sentence in respect of whom the courts make hospital orders, and the number who are subsequently detained in prison as a place of safety under section 37(4) of the Mental Health Act 1983 pending admission to hospital.

In 1983 a total of 766 prisoners were admitted to hospital in pursuance of a hospital order, and 532 prisoners were removed to hospital after detention under the provisions of section 37(4). The corresponding figures for 1984 are not yet available.

Under section 37(4) a court may make a hospital order only if it is satisfied on the evidence of the doctor who would be in charge of the patient's treatment or of some other person representing the managers of the hospital that a place will be available within 28 days of the making of the order. Accordingly it is now very rare for there to be difficulties about the admission to hospital of a patient held in prison as a place of safety.

Prisons are required to notify the Home Office of any case where it appears that the 28-day period may expire without the hospital place becoming available: in no case so reported recently has a prisoner had to be released because a place could not be made available for him within the statutory 28-day period.

Civil Defence College, Easingwold

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to expand the facilities of the library at the Civil Defence college, Easingwold.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on 22 November, at column *250*.

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will establish light and heavy rescue courses at the Civil Defence college, Easingwold.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Guidance about planning for a wartime rescue service is being considered. When this is available we will consider whether the college should run courses on rescue.

Identity Cards

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a consultative document outlining the arguments for and against the

introduction of a national identity card scheme to incorporate an assessment of the costs and merits of different types of identity card.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the numbers of elderly, young and other groups who regularly carry means of identification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I have no information of this sort.

Legislation (Changes)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures used in his Department to assess the desirability of potential changes in the law and the criteria on which he decides to propose such changes to Parliament.

Mr. Mellor: Both procedures and criteria necessarily vary in accordance with the subject matter.

For the purpose of assessing the desirability of changes in the law, it is often appropriate to seek the views of the public and of interested bodies by means of a Green Paper or other consultative document. On some subjects my right hon. and learned Friend receives expert advice from such bodies as the Law Commission, the Criminal Law Revision Committee or the Advisory Committee on Animal Experiments. In certain instances he may refer a question to a departmental committee, working party or other body specially constituted for the purpose.

So far as the criminal law is concerned, the principal factors to which my right hon. and learned Friend has regard in proposing changes to Parliament on whether the conduct in question merits criminal sanctions to deter people from it and to punish those who are not deterred; whether other less drastic measures of control would be ineffective, impracticable or insufficient; and whether the law as amended would be clear and enforceable.

Heroin

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce legislation to combat the distribution and usage of heroin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Unlawful importation, production, supply and possession of heroin are already offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. A person convicted of unlawful possession faces a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment. The maximum penalty for unlawful supply and other trafficking offences is currently 14 years' imprisonment, and the Government have announced its intention to increase this to life imprisonment. My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), has introduced a Bill, due for a Second Reading on 1 February 1985, which may provide an early opportunity to give effect to the proposed change.

Burglary

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Metropolitan police are introducing any additional measures to combat burglary in the Metropolitan police district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December at columns *288-89*. I further understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that he places continued emphasis on community involvement through such schemes as neighbourhood watch in tackling the problem of crime in London, particularly burglary.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders under the age of 18 years have been placed in detention centres in each year since the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1982.

Mr. Mellor: About 4,100 persons aged under 18 were received into detention centres under detention centre orders between 24 May and 31 December 1983 and about 6,300 between 1 January and 30 November 1984.

Drink-Driving

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of criminal proceedings were brought against car drivers in respect of reckless driving resulting in the death of other motorists or pedestrians, where the driver concerned produced a positive alcohol breath-test in 1984; and during which month of 1984 most of these offences occurred.

Mr. Mellor: The available information relates to the offence of causing death by reckless driving and is published annually in "Offences Relating to Motor Vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (tables 5 and 7 of the issue for 1983). Additional details could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information for 1984 is not yet available.

Television Reception

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people who cannot receive television pictures in the United Kingdom are located in Scotland.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his question on 14 November at column *258*.

Metropolitan Police (Computer)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will describe, in relation to the pilot crime reporting computer system of the Metropolitan police, its location and the number of terminals attached to the system; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will list all the data fields used in the pilot crime reporting computer system of the Metropolitan police which are used for crime reporting.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that an experimental automated crime reporting system with one dedicated terminal has been running on P district of the Metropolitan police since 1979. The system covers only offences of burglary, theft from the person, robbery and indecency. The details held in respect of each offence are as follows: crime book

number; report number; classification; date reported; whether detected or undetected; number of prisoners (if any); officer in the case; date/time of the offence; type of property stolen; value stolen; value recovered; type of premises; beat number; exhibit transfer reference number; point of entry; any marks found; details of suspects (i.e. sex, identification code, approximate ages); features of crime (up to three accepted), and location of crime.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Police Computer)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether information relating to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is stored on the Metropolitan 'C' Department computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no information about the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is stored on the computer facilities dedicated to 'C' department.

Metropolitan Police (Fingerprint Recognition)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will print the total cost of the automatic fingerprint recognition system of the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement as to the cost effectiveness and technological effectiveness of the system.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The total cost of the equipment comprising this system was £1,654,000. The system enables fingerprint marks found at scenes of crime to be searched against the database more quickly and effectively and in some cases part-marks which were previously deemed to contain insufficient detail to support practical searching can now be processed and identified. The system has only been in operation since August of this year and it is therefore too soon to evaluate its effectiveness, but its use has been projected as leading to an additional 1,200 identifications annually.

Probation Officers

Mr. Howarth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department to whom, and in what way, probation officers are accountable for their decisions recommending ex-offenders for employment.

Mr. Mellor: Probation officers are accountable through their chief probation officers to the probation committees which employ them.

Mr. Howarth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to probation officers concerning their recommendation of ex-officers for employment, particularly where that employment relates to young people.

Mr. Mellor: Guidance issued by the Home Office in 1963 made it clear that a probation officer should disclose relevant facts relating to character and personality when recommending an ex-offender for employment. In the case of prisoners released on licence a condition, where appropriate, is imposed forbidding work or other organised activities involving children; this is drawn to the attention of the supervising probation officer. My right hon. and learned Friend is arranging for the duty of probation officers dealing with child sex offenders to take every step to prevent contact with children to be spelt out even more firmly.

Police Drug Squad

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the current strength of the police drug squad.

Mr. Giles Shaw: On 31 December 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of officers serving in specialist force drug squads in England and Wales was 554. At that time 41 of the 43 forces have had special drug units but since 1 November 1984 all 43 forces have had special drug units but since 1 November 1984 all 43 forces have had such units and the current strength may therefore be higher. My hon. Friend may have in mind the strength of the drug squad in Greater Manchester police: this is currently 21 officers.

Representation of the People Bill

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide the information and the details of the calculations on which he based his statement, *Official Report*, 10 December, column *755*, that clause 1 of the Representation of the People Bill would enfranchise over half a million new electors.

Mr. Mellor: The statement was based on the best estimates of Her Majesty's diplomatic missions in countries where significant numbers of British citizens are resident. These estimates relied on the information available from official or other sources in the country concerned.

West Yorkshire Probation Service

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many orders were being supervised by West Yorkshire probation service on 31 March 1983 and 31 March 1984 in respect of *(a)* supervision orders, *(b)* probation orders, *(c)* suspended sentence supervision orders, *(d)* young prisoners' licences, *(e)* parole, *(f)* life licences, *(g)* matrimonial supervision orders, *(h)* fine supervision orders and *(i)* any other orders.

Mr. Mellor: Information relating to 31 March 1983 is given in the following table. Corresponding figures for 31 March 1984 are not available centrally because of industrial action by some members of the probation service.

*Persons supervised by the West Yorkshire probation service on 31 March 1983 by type of supervision**

	Number of persons
Probation	2,740
Supervision under the Children and Young Persons Act 1969	1,080
Suspended sentence supervision	180
Money payment supervision	170
Community service order	1,070
After-care†	
Detention centre	610
Borstal	660

	Number of persons
Young prisoner sentenced to:	
less than 18 months	250
18 months or more	180
Parole	170
Life	150
Other statutory‡	30
Voluntary	1,270
Matrimonial supervision	750
Other domestic supervision‖	50
Total persons	8,940

* Each person is counted once for each type of supervision to which they were subject. Individual figures do not add to the total because each person is counted only once on the total irrespective of the number of types of supervision to which they were subject. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

† Pre-and post-release.

‡ Detention under section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, extended sentence and psychiatric hospital conditional discharge.

‖ Wardship, guardianship and Children Act 1975 supervision.

Prison

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the proposals and recommendations in the report of the control review committee on the long-term prison system.

Mr. Mellors: Work on this wide ranging report is being vigourously pursued and my right hon. and learned Friend intends to make a more detailed statement about our progress around Easter 1985.

Fire Services

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the authorised establishment levels of uniformed firefighters for each of the metropolitan county brigades for each year from 1974 to the present, indicating where changes made to the basic working weeks have had an influence on the figures.

Mr. Giles Shaw : There is no requirement for my right hon. and learned Friend's approval of fire brigade establishments. Closure of fire stations and reductions in the number of appliances or of whole-time members of a brigade whose duties normally include fire fighting and part-time members of a brigade require his consent under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 (as amended). Details of establishments are published annually as a Command Paper in the Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services. The report for 1983 (Cmnd 9277) contains at appendix 5 a bar chart showing the effect of successive reductions in a fireman's working week.

Soliciting

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for *(a)* the number of women imprisoned for soliciting imprisoned after a non-payment of a fine imposed for soliciting and prosecuted for soliciting in the last year before female soliciting ceased, under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1982, to be an imprisonable offence and *(b)* the number of women imprisoned for non-payment of a fine for soliciting, and the number of prosecutions for female soliciting in the year following that change.

Mr. Mellor: Section 71 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982, which abolished imprisonment for loitering and soliciting for purposes of prostitution, was implemented on 31 January 1983. For the readily available information on the numbers of prostitutes committed into custody in default of payment of a fine in the calendar years 1982 and 1983, I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 6 December at columns *280-1*. I shall reply as soon as possible to the other parts of the question.

Immigration

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why statistics on entry clearance refusals are only available for the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Waddington: As previously stated in reply to a similar Question, the collection of data on applications for entry clearance from countries outside the Indian sub-continent was terminated at the end of 1979 because it was considered that its usefulness did not justify the resources required to undertake it. Information continues to be collected for the countries of the Indian sub-continent because of the large number of applications there. Also, arrangements are in hand so that similar statistics can be produced for Hong Kong. Information on acceptances for settlement and admissions of husbands and fiances is available for all countries.

Deportation

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to reduce the involvement of the police in deportation work.

Mr. Brittan: Arrangements have been made for the Immigration Service to take over responsibility from the police service in Great Britain for serving deportation orders, including tracing the subject of the order where necessary, making the practical arrangements for removal in most cases, and the service of detention and restriction orders on persons subject to deportation proceedings. Responsibility for escorting and where necessary arresting the subjects of deportation and detention orders will remain with the police. The change, which will be reviewed after a year's operation, is intended to relieve pressure on police manpower and make better use of existing resources within the Immigration Service.

Parliamentary Boundary Commissions

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the membership of the Parliamentary Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with effect from 1 January 1985.

Mr. Brittan: Mr. Speaker will remain of all four Commissions. The other members of the Commissions for England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be as follows:

Commission	
Commission for England	*Appointed by*
The Hon. Mr. Justice Walton	The Lord Chancellor
His Honour Judge John Newey QC	The Home Secretary

Commission	
Mr. T M H Scott MA	The Secretary of State for the Environment
Commission for Wales	
The Hon. Mr. Justice Kenneth Jones	The Lord Chancellor
Mr. J. R. Long LLB DPA	The Home Secretary
Mr. M A McLaggan JP DL MA	The Secretary of State for Wales
Commission for Northern Ireland	
The Hon. Mr. Justice Hutton	The Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland
Mr. P G Duffy FCCA FCMA AICS	The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Mr. W T Ewing OBE LLB JP	The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The appointment of Mr. Justice Walton will expire on 31 December 1986; the other appointments expire on 31 December 1988.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is not yet able to announce the full composition of the Scottish Commission and he will make a separate announcement in due course.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been made against the police in relation to activities during the course of the miners' dispute; and how many complaints have been upheld.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *638*]: The available information is that in the period from 13 March to 11 December 1984, 516 complaints were made against police officers relating to actions arising during the course of the dispute and that 96 of these have been withdrawn. Most of the complaints are still under investigation and statistics on the number substantiated could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Young Persons (Remand)

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young persons, male and female, aged *(a)* 15 to 16 years and *(b)* 17 to 21 years have been held on remand in adult establishments so far during 1984.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 December 1984, c. *633*]: The readily available information relates to initial receptions of persons aged under 21 on remand into adult prisons and is given in the following table. Information for 1984 is not yet available. It is normal for young male prisoners to be kept apart from adult prisoners whereas in establishments for females women and girls may mix.

Untried and convicted unsentenced persons aged 15 and under 21 received initially into an adult Prison Department establishment in England and Wales—1983

Estimated number (1)

	15-16		*17-20*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Adult prisons with remand units/wings for prisoners aged under 21 (2)	95	—	370	—
Remand centres taking remand prisoners of all ages (3)	590	15	7,840	480
Other adult prisons	40	10	4,620	480

(1) The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.
(2) Cardiff, Dorchester, Exeter, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Swansea, and Winchester.
(3) Ashford, Low Newton, Manchester, Pucklechurch, and Risley.

Attacks on Women (Statistics)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of attacks on women in the Metropolitan police area for each year since 1979 and for each month to date in 1984 by category of *(a)* rape, *(b)* indecent assault by age group and *(c)* incest; and what is the number of successful prosecutions.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *160*]: The following table gives the most recent information available on prosecutions.

Persons found guilty at all courts in the Metropolitan Police District of certain sexual offences by offence and year.

Number of persons

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Rape	87	100	61	104	63
Indecent assault on a female					
under 16	137	153	140	134	125
aged 16 and over	103	123	123	131	139
Incest	15	10	9	8	6

DEFENCE

Wood Farm Estate, Malvern

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters on the Wood Farm estate, Malvern, have been declared surplus to his Department's requirements; and what means are used to make their availability known to service men under his discounted sales scheme.

Mr. Lee: No married quarters on the Wood Farm estate, Malvern, have been declared surplus to Ministry of Defence requirements. All suitable surplus married quarters for sale to service men under the discounted sales scheme are advertised in bulletins issued by the joint services married quarters sales office.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of units of accommodation owned by his Department in the Wood Farm estate, Malvern, for married officers, single officers and married and single soldiers of other ranks and the number at present occupied; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Ministry of Defence accommodation at the Wood Farm estate, Malvern, for both married and single service men, consists of eight married officers' quarters and 23 married soldiers' quarters.

At present six of these quarters are occupied by married service men and their families, and one is allocated for occupation in the near future. A further two soldiers' quarters are being used as single accommodation for senior NCOs.

The future accommodation requirements at this site are currently under review.

Fazakerley (Estate and Assets)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Defence what approach has been made to his Department by Williams Motors Ltd. about the future of the estate and assets at Fazakerley.

Mr. Lee: When the present repair contracts with Williams Motors expire at the end of 1985, under the terms of its licence the company will need to vacate the premises. However, we are exploring whether it would be interested in buying the property from us.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been prosecuted since 1969 in Northern Ireland for offences against the person allegedly committed while on duty; and of whom *(a)* how many were convicted and of what offences and *(b)* how many were acquitted and of what charges.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 9 April at column *44*.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Defence, since 1969, how many personal injury claims have been made against the Ministry of Defence for torts allegedly committed by soldiers on duty in Northern Ireland; and of which *(a)* how many have been settled out of court and how many of these were in the plaintiff's favour and *(b)* how many have gone to court and how many of these were settled in the plaintiff's favour.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 9 April at column *43*.

Military Exercises

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list all military exercises involving British forces in 1984, the dates of duration and other countries involved;

(2) if he will list all joint British, Turkish and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation exercises involving military co-operation between Britain and Turkey since 1978.

Mr. Stanley: Considerations of both security and disproportionate cost prevent me from publishing a comprehensive list of exercises involving British forces in 1984, and a comprehensive list of exercises since 1978 involving British and Turkish forces. Britain and Turkey do of course take part in a number of NATO exercises each year.

Iraqi Military Personnel

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Iraqi air force personnel have received training at Carlisle in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lee: There are no RAF training facilities at Carlisle. Commercial training at Carlisle airport is not the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Iraqi military personnel received training in the United Kingdom in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Lee: Details of training given to foreign nationals is confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Government concerned. Some members of the Iraqi armed forces have been trained in United Kingdom military establishments this year and some were here in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

NATO (Military Actions)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards military actions by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Governments outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation area.

Mr. Stanley: The North Atlantic treaty is concerned only with the collective defence of the Alliance member states and the maintenance of security within the North Atlantic area. Military actions by NATO members outside this area are a matter for the individual Governments concerned.

Turkey (British Military Personnel)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military personnel were based in Turkey in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Stanley: The number of British service personnel stationed in Turkey at 1 April for each of the requested years is as follows:

	Service personnel
1979	77
1980	64
1981	16
1982	14
1983	14
1984	13

Turkish Military Personnel

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Turkish military personnel received training in Britain in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Lee: Details of training given to foreign nationals is confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Government concerned. Some members of the Turkish armed forces have been trained in United Kingdom military establishments this year and some were here in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Turkey (British Naval Ships)

Mr. O'Neill asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many British naval ships paid visits to Turkish ports in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Stanley: The number of Her Majesty's ships and royal fleet auxiliaries visiting Turkish ports each year since 1979 was:

	Number
1979	8
1980	11
1981	3
1982	4
1983	3
1984	1

Royal Auxiliary Air Force

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government are currently giving consideration to giving back a flying role to the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Mr. Stanley: The reintroduction of a flying role for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force is still under consideration. Account will have to be taken of its relative priority against other demands on defence resources.

Exercise Brave Defender 1985

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give information on the United Kingdom's contribution to Exercise Brave Defender 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: Brave Defender is a national military home defence exercise to test plans for the ground defence of vital installations in the United Kingdom in conventional war.

General Belgrano

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *432-3*, on how many occasions Northwood received reports from HMS Conqueror on the course and position of the General Belgrano; at what time these reports were received; and if all these reports have been retained and are available to him.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to the reply given to the hon. Gentleman by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 18 December at column *101*.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Pym asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his intention to commemorate in the United Kingdom those who died in the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Heseltine: A South Atlantic campaign memorial, bearing the names of all those who lost their lives, is to be erected, with the agreement of the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's, in the crypt of the cathedral, in a suitable place close to other military memorials there. Work will commence shortly and the memorial will be unveiled next summer.

Her Majesty the Queen has graciously accepted an invitation to unveil the memorial during a commemorative service in the cathedral, to which the next of kin of those who died will be invited.

Royal Ordnance plc

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is now in a position to announce the timing of vesting day for Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Butler: Vesting day will be 2 January 1985. On that day, a scheme will come into effect pursuant to section 1 of the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984 which will transfer assets and liabilities of the ROF trading fund and certain other establishments to the Royal Ordnance plc. The existing shares in the company have all been transferred to the ownership of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. A copy of the scheme will be laid before Parliament as soon as the House re-convenes after the recess.

Trident

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs will be provided by the United Kingdom purchase of Trident missiles; and how many of these will be in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butler: Fifty five per cent. of the estimated cost of Trident at £8,729 million is expected to be spent in Britain. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) on 24 July at column *602*, the Trident programme is expected to create an extra 18,000 job opportunities directly and 14,000 indirectly in the United Kingdom during the peak years of the project. No information is available on job opportunities created by the dollar expenditure, including that on the missiles. However, a number of United Kingdom companies are competing for work on the American Trident II programme, with the potential for further jobs being created in the United Kingdom.

Military Equipment (Tempest Testing)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give, for each of the last five years *(a)* the total numbers of separate pieces of equipment tested by his Department for compliance with the Tempest North Atlantic Treaty Organisation standard specification for military terminals, *(b)* the total number of pieces of equipment found acceptable as being up to the Tempest standard, and *(c)* the average length of time taken between submission of equipment for Tempest testing and the issuing of a Tempest certificate.

Mr. Butler: The Ministry of Defence is not responsible for testing equipments for compliance with the NATO standard and specification for Tempest protection of military terminals.

RAF (New Basic Trainer)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has received any firm offers or orders for British-made equipment from any potential suppliers of the Royal Air Force's new basic trainer.

Mr. Butler: The four tenders for the future Royal Air Force basic trainer were received from British firms, three of which had made arrangements with foreign companies to manufacture aircraft designed by them. None of the countries involved have made firm orders for British-made equipment which specifically relate to the competition for the new trainer.

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Defence if it has been proposed that the Shorts Tucano basic trainer will be British-built under licence to Royal Air Force requirements rather than an exact replica of a Brazilian aircraft.

Mr. Butler: Yes.

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the original specifications for the Royal Air Force basic trainer which companies were required to meet remain valid.

Mr. Butler: Yes.

Departmental Police

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has it in mind to review the future role of his Department's police.

Mr. Butler: Yes. My right hon. Friend has decided to set up a high level independent committee to review the role, composition and size of the Ministry of Defence police in the context of current policy and administration of the physical security of Ministry of Defence establishments in the United Kingdom. The chairman will be Sir Ewen Broadbent, formerly second permanent under-secretary of State, Ministry of Defence, and the members Major-General D. C. Alexander, commandant of the Scottish police college, and Sir Peter Matthews, formerly Chief Constable of Surrey.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether he will publish or make available a list of the names, service, service numbers and ranks of those service personnel involved in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958 who constitute part of the present study by the National Radiological Protection Board.

(2) if he will publish or make available a list of the names, service, service number and ranks of those service personnel who were involved in incurring additional risks in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958; and if he will give details of the planned special exposure level of radiation incurred by these individuals;

(3) if the records of the dosages of radiation incurred by the service personnel involved in the nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958, inclusive, will be made available to the National Radiological Protection Board; and if the original dosimeters and personnel film badges will also be made available to the National Radiological Protection Board;

(4) if he will give details of the appropriate protection provided to the service personnel involved in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958.

Mr. Butler: I will answer shortly.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the precise time, stating whether it is London or local time at which Admiral Woodward learned of the visual contact which HMS Conqueror had established with the Belgrano.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Gentlaman of 14 December at column *618*.

Over-the-horizon Radar System

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State Defence if he will make a statement on the United States' military plans to install an over-the-horizon radar system in England and Scotland.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *206*]: The United Kingdom and United States are collaborating in a joint programme of studies aimed at testing the feasibility of siting an over-the-horizon radar system in the United Kingdom. These studies are at a very early stage and there are at present no firm plans for implementation.

Joint Radar Project

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the status and purpose of the joint radar project with the United States of America known as Cold Witness;

(2) what is the status of the joint programme with the United States of America to install an over-the-horizon radar in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to the reply*, 3 December 1984, c. *50*]: The United Kingdom and United States are collaborating in a joint programme of studies aimed at testing the feasibility of siting an over-the-horizon radar system in the United Kingdom. These studies are at a very early stage and there are at present no firm plans for implementation. The project is no longer called Cold Witness.

TRANSPORT

Buses (Deregulation)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recommendations he intends to issue to ensure that the provision of transport arranged for the purpose of taking school pupils in rural areas to and from their homes is maintained in the event of deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government have no plans to amend the existing law governing the duty to provide transport for school pupils.

National Bus Company

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions will be made to enable the National Bus Company to meet the expected shortfall in spending on socially necessary routes even if the full initial £20 million transitional grant proposed in the White Paper on deregulation is allocated.

Mr. David Mitchell: Rural bus grant will be only one of the sources of finance for the many operators of rural

services. This grant, up to £20 million in the first year, will be distributed direct to operators by the Department of Transport. It is in addition to the continuing, and substantial, sums of money paid by local authorities to maintain rural services. Under the Government's proposals authorities will be able to obtain better value for money through competitive tendering. The NBC will have full opportunity to participate in the tendering process.

British Rail (Resources)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what resources he intends to make available to British Rail to enable it to provide suitable replacements of services or routes withdrawn from its network.

Mr. David Mitchell: In dealing with any proposal for the withdrawal of a rail passenger service, we propose that it should be open to British Rail, the TUCC and my right hon. Friend to propose or require the provisions of a guaranteed and—where necessary—subsidised substitute bus service. Where consent to withdrawal of the rail service was given, the substitute bus service could be subsidised through the Government's grant to British Rail for its passenger service.

Electrified Railway Line

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total mileage of electrified railway line on inter-city routes in each of the years since 1954.

Mr. David Mitchell: In 1979 British Rail had 2310 route miles (6107 track miles) of electrified railway. Electric services from London to Bedford began in 1983, adding 54 route miles and 225 track miles.

Electrification of a further 617 route miles (1533 track miles) has been approved since 1981. Work will be completed between 1985 and 1991.

Separate figures are not readily available for Inter-City routes or for earlier years.

Redundancies (British Rail)

Mr. Sackville asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* compulsory and *(b)* voluntary redundancies there were of British Rail employees in the months October, November and December 1983.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail is not able to provide the information in the form requested. However, I understand that in the last 15 weeks of 1983 (19 September to 31 December) 3,092 British Rail staff left on voluntary redundancy terms, including 1,488 from British Rail Engineering Limited. There were no compulsory redundancies.

Soviet Vessels (British Ports)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government have any plans to ban Soviet merchant or passenger ships from British ports.

Mr. David Mitchell: I will write to the hon. Member.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Self-help and Community Groups

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the self-help or community groups in Northern Ireland which are receiving public funding and the amount of financial assistance given to each over the last five years for which records are available;

(2) if each self-help or community group receiving public funding is subject to supervision by Government officials; and if reports are available on the achievements of self-help or community groups indicating the value for money which has been allocated to date;

(3) if financial assistance will continue to be made to self-help or community groups in future.

Dr. Boyson: Information needed to list self help or community groups and their funding is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The degree of supervision of these groups varies depending on the purpose for which funds are made available, the nature and experience of the groups involved and the extent of the funding. Groups provide annual reports where appropriate. Financial assistance will continue to be given to self-help and community groups.

Vehicle Repair Businesses

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by name and address all businesses engaged in motor accident body repair and respraying which are paying rates in the constituency of East Antrim.

Dr. Boyson: This information is not available.

Murder Statistics

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders have been committed in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been carried out by *(a)* Republican terrorist groups and *(b)* Loyalist paramilitaries.

Mr. Scott: The total number of murders committed in Northern Ireland since 1 January 1980 and the numbers of these for which terrorists are believed to have been responsible are as follows:

Year	*Total*	*Attributed to:*	
		Republicans	*Loyalists*
1980	85	53	13
1981	95	69	12
1982	99	71	13
1983	86	54	7
1984*	60	40	8

* Up to 16 December

Student Grants

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many students in higher education in each of the five education and library boards are presently receiving the minimum grant;

(2) how much he estimates will be saved by the abolition of the minimum grant to students in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: The number of students holding minimum awards is as follows:

Education and Library Board	Number
North-Eastern	521
South-Eastern	749
Western	336
Belfast	538
Southern	69
Total	2,213

In addition, 98 students are in receipt of minimum awards from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

On the basis of there being approximately 2,300 minimum awards, abolition would save some £0·5 million per annum; if the changes in parental contribution rates recently announced for England and Wales were also applied, the overall savings would be about £0·2 million.

Norah McCabe (RUC Officers)

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who were involved in the incident in which Norah McCabe was shot are still on active police duty; and, of these, how many have been promoted and to what ranks.

Mr. Hurd: The 11 police officers involved in the patrol are still serving in the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Three have since been promoted: One to assistant chief constable, one to chief inspector and one to sergeant.

Extradition

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many extradition requests made in respect of people living in the Irish Republic and wanted for questioning regarding involvement in terrorist crimes in the United Kingdom have been turned down by the courts in the Irish Republic since 1970 to the latest available date.

Mr. Scott: 49 to 14 December 1984.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy for strip-searching prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Armagh.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *217*]: Strip searches are a necessary part of maintaining prison security. The procedures used in Northern Ireland are the same as those which have been used for many years in comparable prisons in Great Britain and elsewhere. The need for and frequency of searches are kept under close review. I am satisfied that the present level is kept to the necessary minimum. This is borne out by the statistics. For example, in the last three months, since 1 September, there have been two strip searches a month of women remand prisoners attending Armagh court house.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement listing all prisoners in Northern Ireland currently remanded in custody detailing where they are held, how long they have been on remand, what charges they face, whether they have served any previous periods on remand and the charges that face them, whether they have served any previous periods in prison and the number of court appearances they have made in respect of the charges on which they are remanded.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *217*]: It would not be appropriate to publish all the information requested in respect of named individuals and some could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many salmon and grilse passed through the salmon trap on the river bank at Bushmills in each month in each year since 1973, the total for each year, the number of fish taken and sold by the Department of Agriculture in each year, the sums realised from any such sales annually and the average size of the salmon and grilse ascending the river in each year.

Dr. Boyson [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *209-210*]:

Number of salmon passing through trap at Bushmills

Year	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
1973*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,351
1974	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,358
1975	6	6	133	56	64	992	100	1,005	583	236	25	3,206
1976	—	1	10	60	353	177	261	583	1,394	111	49	2,999
1977	—	2	29	22	12	268	428	494	694	143	13	2,105
1978	—	9	17	17	2	249	734	463	97	23	—	1,611
1079	—	1	29	47	85	573	648	296	64	11	10	1,764
1980	—	—	19	5	151	963	869	468	115	140	27	2,757
1981	—	5	8	116	84	371	331	378	63	58	37	1,451
1982	—	—	—	12	10	202	554	441	203	57	3	1,482
1983	—	—	—	8	16	10	—	303	486	88	23	934
1984	—	—	1	—	1	35	90	341	128	23	5	624

* Monthly figures not available for 1973 and 1974.

Number of fish taken from trap and sold by Department of Agriculture

Year	Number	Sums realised £
1973	356	1,706
1974	220	665
1975	357	1,604
1976	369	2,372
1977	237	1,820
1978	219	1,889
1979	300	3,393
1980	839	5,151
1981	311	2,536
1982	32	246
1983	nil	nil

Average size of salmon and grilse: figures are shown in millimetres

Year	Salmon		Grilse	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1973	749	710	619	608
1974	731	732	610	600
1975	737	718	627	608
1976	696	705	632	614
1977	704	711	675	605
1978	740	751	610	617
1979	747	716	597	581
1980	730	716	591	577
1981	725	711	608	585
1982	754	718	615	580
1983	715	706	649	625

Housing

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the various housing subsidies, and grants payable for the building, improvement and repair of dwellings in Northern Ireland since 1954, the periods in which they were payable and the maximum amounts in each case up to the recent most convenient date.

Mr. Chris Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *59*]: The available information is as follows:

Type of grant or subsidy	Primary legislation	Period of operation	Amount payable*	£
Subsidy for houses built for letting by Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Local Authorities and Northern Ireland Housing Trust	Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1945	1945-1977	60 successive annual contributions	
			A. Flats of less than 650 sq ft	980 pa
			B. (i) Old person dwellings irrespective of size; (ii) up to 3-person dwellings	984 pa
			C. 4-person dwellings	988 pa
			D. 5-person dwellings	992 pa
			E. 6-person dwellings	996 pa
			F. 7-person dwellings	1,004 pa
			In addition a special subsidy of £195 per dwelling was payable in 1976-77.	
Subsidy for houses built for letting by housing associations	Housing and Local Government (Misc. Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1946	1946-1976	Related to individual schemes.	
Private Enterprise Subsidy: Houses built for Owner-Occupation	Housing (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 1946	1946-1978	A. Houses up to 500 sq ft	150
			B. Houses of 500 sq ft-750 sq ft	300
			C. Houses of 750 sq ft-1050 sq ft	385
Private Enterprise Subsidy — Houses Built for letting	Housing and Local Government (Misc. Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1946 and Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1951	1946-1978	A. Houses up to 500 sq ft	300
			B. Houses of 500 sq ft-750 sq ft	500
			C. Houses of 750 sq ft-1050 sq ft	575
Housing on Farms—Reconditioning of premises for occupation as farm houses and approved workers houses	Housing on Farms Act (Northern Ireland) 1948 and Housing on Farms Act (Northern Ireland) 1972	1948-1976	Where the approved cost exceeded £75 the lesser of A .half the approved cost or B .the sum of £1,600	
Housing on Farms — Provision of houses for approved workers	Housing on Farms Act (Northern Ireland) 1948 and Housing on Farms Act (Northern Ireland) 1972	1948-1978	For houses exceeding 750 sq ft and not exceeding 1050 sq ft—£600	

Type of grant or subsidy	Primary legislation	Period of operation	Amount payable* £
Improvement/Conversion Grants	Housing (Misc. Provisions) and Rent Restrictions Law (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 1956; Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1967; Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1971; Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981; and Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983	1956-date	Maximum eligible expense in non-priority cases—Improvement Grant—£6,600; Conversion Grant—£7,700. Maximum eligible expense in priority cases — Improvement Grant—£10,200; Conversion Grant—£11,800. The rate of grant payable varies from 50 per cent. to 90 per cent. of eligible expense depending on individual circumstances.
Standard Grant	Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 and Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1971	1963-1976	£200 for the provision of basic amenities.
Repairs Grant	Non-Statutory	1975/76	75 per cent. of maximum eligible expense of £800.
Repairs Grant	Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983	1976	Maximum eligible expense — £4,800. The rate of grant payable varies between 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. of eligible expense depending on individual circumstances.
Intermediate Grant	Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981; and Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983	1976	Maximum eligible expense — £2,275 for the provision of amenities — £3,000 for associated repairs. The rate of grant payable varies between 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. depending on individual circumstances.
Housing Associations Grant	Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; and Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981	1976	Related to individual capital schemes undertaken by registered housing associations.
Special Grant	Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983	1983	maximum eligible expense—£8,100 for provision of means of escape from fire—£3,000 for works of repair or replacement. The rate of grant payable varies between 50 per cent. and 90 per cent. of eligible expense depending on individual circumstances.
Urban Development Grant	Social Needs Grant Act (Northern Ireland) 1970	1983	Related to individual schemes.

* The maximum amount of subsidy or grant which applied when a particular scheme was wound up or in the case of schemes still in force the current maximum amount of grant payable.

Allowances

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give, in tabular form, the number of those receiving attendance allowance, mobility allowance, invalid care allowance, non-contributory invalidity pension or severe disablement allowance for the years 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 under the various boards.

Mr. Chris Patten: The available information is as follows:

Numbers of recipients at 31 December each year

Type of Benefit	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Attendance allowance	15,828	16,176	17,580	18,707	20,283 at 4 October
Mobility allowance	5,266 + 15 cars	6,039 + 14 cars	6,797 + 14 cars	7,559 + 14 cars	8,179 + 14 cars at September
Invalid care allowance	672	680	685	694	683 at 23 August
Non-contributory invalidity pension	7,561	7,715	8,220	8,464	10,289 at 26 October
Housewives non-contributory invalidity pension	2,271	2,429	2,546	2,587	2,817 at 26 October
Severe disablement allowance	—	—	—	—	13,348 at 30 November

The information is not available by Board areas.

Republic of Ireland (Citizens)

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many citizens of the Irish Republic are presently living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: I have been asked to reply.

It is estimated from the labour force survey that there were about half a million citizens of the Irish Republic living in the United Kingdom in the second quarter of 1983. This estimate includes some persons who hold dual British/Irish citizenship. Further information on Irish citizens living in Great Britain is given in table 12 of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' monitor "Labour Force Survey 1983: country of birth, ethnic origin, nationality and year of entry" (reference LFS 84/2).

EMPLOYMENT

Skillcentres (Closure)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the 950 staff employed within the 29 skillcentres to be closed by the Manpower Services Commission by 1986 will receive redundancy payments; and what payments will be made.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission has not yet taken a decision on the proposals made to it by the skillcentre training agency. It is too early to predict how many of the 1,050 staff who would be affected if the proposals were agreed might have to be declared redundant or, for those in the instructor group, be compulsorily retired at age 60 and over. Every effort would be made to redeploy those affected and to effect the reductions with as little hardship to individuals as possible. Levels of redundancy payment are determined by the provisions of the principal civil service pension scheme. These are summarised in the guide "Civil Service Pensions Explained" (2nd edition) a copy of which is in the library of the House. Individual entitlement would vary considerably.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of jobs which will be lost resulting from the proposed closure of the skillcentres at Castle Bromwich, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Long Eaton, Redditch, the young persons' training centre at Handsworth, Birmingham, and the Wolverhampton annexe at Dudley.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission has not yet taken a decision on the proposals made to it by the skillcentre training agency. 205 people are currently employed at the skillcentres in Castle Bromwich, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Long Eaton and Redditch, the young persons' training centre in Handsworth and the Wolverhampton skillcentre annexe in Dudley.

Whilst jobs at these centres would go if the proposals were agreed some jobs would be gained in the skillcentres remaining in the proposed network and in the expanded mobile instructor service. It is not possible at this stage to determine the net effect on jobs of these proposed closures, though nationally there would be a loss of about 950 jobs.

The impact of the proposals on the 205 individual members of staff at these centres would depend on redeployment measures and on the nature of any retirement or redundancy arrangements yet to be agreed and implemented.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the European Community Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Brussels on 13 December.

Mr. Tom King: I, together with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Security, represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached agreement on five proposals. The resolution on long-term unemployment makes sensible and realistic suggestions about action to be taken by the Community and member states, while recognising that the problem cannot be resolved without policies designed to achieve economic recovery. I welcome the emphasis on the need to increase flexibility in the labour market and on the role of employment and training measures such as the community programme.

The second EC programme to combat poverty will enable us to try out new approaches to problems which we share with other member states and will involve co-operation with the voluntary sector. The Council also agreed a third programme for the exchange of young workers and a recommendation on positive action for women which is very much in accordance with Government policy and adopted a regulation for a labour force survey in 1985.

There was a short debate on the report of the ad hoc working group on the draft "Vredeling" directive. I welcome the report, which has brought to the surface many of the United Kingdom's concerns about the proposals and identifies the number of issues which require detailed discussion, in particular a new approach based on giving employee a right to be given information. I was encouraged to note that a number of other member states appear to share at least some of our concerns.

It was the general view that the Vredeling draft does not provide a suitable basis for agreement. The alternative approach to employees information and involvement was discussed and this will be further explored. While I maintained our general reserve of principle on whether the legislative rather than the voluntary approach was the way to proceed, I agreed that we would take part in further discussions.

The Council reviewed progress on the draft directive on the protection of workers against industrial noise, a matter on which I would welcome early action by the Community. There was a general wish that the Council should agree the directive during the forthcoming Italian Presidency.

The Council ended with a discussion on statistical machinery to establish priority for assistance to regions from the European social fund. I welcome Commissioner Richard's statement that if the Council is unable to reach a concensus on this issue, the Commission will introduce statistical machinery within the framework of the fund guidelines.

EEC (Prices and Costs)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing for the last eight six-monthly periods for which figures are available, for each member state of the European Economic Community and for the European Economic Community as a whole, the index of producer prices, index of unit labour costs, index of import price competitiveness, increase in real unit labour costs and increase in non-wage labour costs.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information on unit labour costs, estimated by the European Commission, relates to annual rather than six-monthly periods and is given in the following table. The indices of producer prices and of import price competitiveness are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Comparable information on non-wage labour costs for European Community countries is only available from the triennial survey of labour costs, for which the latest results relate to 1981 and were published by Eurostat in 1984. More recent estimates for Great Britain were given in an article in the August 1984 *Employment Gazette*. Copies of both of these publications are available in the Library.

Changes in Unit Labour Costs, Whole Economy

	Percentage change over the previous year in Unit Labour costs (i)	Consumer Prices (ii)	'Real' Unit Labour Costs (i) relative to (ii)
Germany (FR)			
1980	5·8	5·5	0·3
1981	4·3	5·9	−1·5
1982	3·5	5·3	−1·7
1983	0·7	2·9	−2·1
France			
1980	13·3	13·6	−0·3
1981	13·4	13·4	0·0
1982	11·7	12·0	−0·3
1983	9·4	9·4	0·0
Italy			
1980	18·6	21·2	−2·1
1981	22·7	19·5	2·7
1982	17·2	16·4	0·7
1983	14·9	14·7	0·2
Netherlands			
1980	5·0	7·0	−1·9
1981	3·2	6·8	−3·4
1982	4·7	6·0	−1·2
1983	−0·1	2·8	−2·8
Belgium			
1980	5·5	6·7	−1·1
1981	7·0	7·6	−0·6
1982	5·0	8·7	−3·4
1983	4·2	7·7	−3·2
Luxembourg			
1980	7·2	6·3	0·8
1981	9·9	8·1	1·7
1982	7·7	9·3	−1·5
1983	8·9	8·7	0·2
United Kingdom			
1980	20·6	18·0	2·2
1981	10·9	11·9	−0·9
1982	4·4	8·6	−3·9
1983	4·1	4·6	−0·5
Ireland			
1980	18·0	18·2	−0·2
1981	15·0	20·4	−4·5
1982	13·2	17·2	−3·4
1983	9·1	10·2	−1·0
Denmark			
1980	10·6	12·3	−1·5
1981	8·0	11·8	−3·4
1982	8·0	10·1	−1·9
1983	5·5	6·9	−1·3
Greece			
1980	14·9	24·8	−7·9
1981	24·9	24·5	0·3
1982	24·3	20·9	2·8
1983	16·9	20·5	−3·0
European Community			
1980	12·1	14·3	−1·9
1981	10·7	12·8	−1·9
1982	7·1	11·0	−3·5
1983	4·6	8·5	−3·6

Source:

(i) 'European Economy', Commission of the European Communities, March 1984.

(ii) 'Consumer Price Index', Eurostat, September 1984.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many children in each local authority are taking part in the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The local education authorities which started technical and vocational education initiative projects in 1983 and have had two annual intakes of students have the following numbers currently taking part.

Authority	*Number of students*
Barnsley	708
Bedfordshire	1,039
Birmingham	500
Bradford	517
Clwyd	684
Devon	554
Enfield	412
Hereford and Worcester	507
Hertfordshire	606
Leicestershire	1,037
Sandwell	1,147
Staffordshire	624
Wigan	458
Wirral	509

The local education authorities in England and Wales and education authorities in Scotland which started projects in 1984 have the following numbers taking part:

Authority	*Number of students*
Berkshire	239
Bolton	179
Borders	194
Buckinghamshire	259
Bury	197
Cambridgeshire	225
Cheshire	200
Cleveland	222
Cornwall	293
Coventry	267
Croydon	235
Cumbria	226
Derbyshire	236
Doncaster	236
Dudley	250
Dumfries and Galloway	227
Durham	259
East Sussex	249
Essex	235
Fife	232
Gloucestershire	271
Gwent	250
Gwynedd	230
Hampshire	245
Havering	256
Isle of Wight	264
Mid Glamorgan	246
Newcastle	239
Norfolk	207
Northamptonshire	245
Northumberland	277
North Tyneside	253
Powys	267
Richmond	250
Shropshire	242
Solihull	256
Somerset	258
South Tyneside	250
Stockport	251
Strathclyde: Glasgow	238
Strathclyde: Renfrew	220
Suffolk	231
Sunderland	240
Surrey	262
Tameside	256
Warwickshire	216
West Glamorgan	247

Chapelcross Nuclear Power Station (Radiation)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the levels of radiation among workers at Chapelcross nuclear power station; and what steps he is taking to reduce them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The radiation dose levels at Chapelcross reflect the fact that this is one of the earliest nuclear power stations built in this country. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is satisfied that the doses received by workers on the site are well within annual limits and are acceptable. The licensee is required by a condition of the nuclear site licence to take all reasonable steps to minimise exposure to persons on the site.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he has plans to abolish the Construction Industry Training Board; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received advocating the abolition of the Construction Industry Training Board since June 1983; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I have received a small number of representations in the past 18 months about the future of the Construction Industry Training Board.

We have pointed out in our responses that employer organisations in the industry expressed strong support for the retention of the board during the Government's review of industrial training in 1981, and that they remain convinced of the need for statutory arrangements in the industry.

Under the Industrial Training Act 1982, employers have a greater say in the running of boards. My right hon. Friend and I have consistently stressed to board chairmen the need to ensure companies receive value for money. The Construction Industry Training Board plays an important role in the Government's overall training plans and has been particularly successful in managing a youth training scheme. The Government have no plans to abolish the board.

Factory Closures and Redundancies (Merseyside)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* factory closures and *(b)* redundancies in each year since 1979 (i) on Merseyside, (ii) in Kirkby and (iii) in Prescot.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is given in the following table.

Confirmed redundancies and factory closures as due to occur for 1979 to 1984

Year	Merseyside Special Development Area*		Kirkby Jobcentre Area		Prescot Jobcentre Area	
	Factory closures†	Total confirmed redundancies	Factory closures†	Total confirmed redundancies	Factory closures†	Total confirmed redundancies
1979	71	15,225	7	1,792	3	563
1980	86	19,355	9	2,117	2	712
1981	106	24,635	7	2,232	5	847
1982	73	15,898	3	1,302	1	233
1983	64	13,234	4	1,350	Nil	Nil
1984‡	49	11,181	2	397	2	449

* Includes Prescot and Kirkby Jobcentre areas. Includes St. Helens Jobcentre area to 31 July 1980.
† Factory closures resulting in redundancies of ten or more employees.
‡ January to October.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consular Offices

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those consular offices which, as he announced on 25 November, *Official Report*, column *426*, would be closed shortly.

Mr. Renton: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on 18 December at column *137*.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why he is proposing to close the British consular office in Thessaloniki.

Mr. Renton: The consulate in Salonika is to be closed as part of the package of measures announced on 22 November which was designed to ensure that Foreign and Commonwealth Office expenditure in 1985-86 remains within the provision already approved by Parliament. We regret that our support for exporters will not be as comprehensive as in the past. An honorary consul will be appointed who will be able to provide useful contracts with local authorities, commerce and industry.

Wild Birds

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the European Community directive in the conservation of wild birds (79/409) will apply to the Canary Islands, Madeira, the Azores and the Chafarine; and if these island groups will be defined as being part of the European territory of Spain and Portugal.

Mr. Rifkind: The European Economic Community directive on the conservation of wild birds will aplly to Madeira and the Azores and to Ceuta and Melilla (with which the Chafarine Islands are associated) by virtue of the terms of Spanish and Portuguese accession to the Community. Negotiations are still in progress on the status of the Canary Islands.

Plutonium (Military Use)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct Her Majesty's ambassador to the United States to seek to obtain a copy of the recent statement to Congress by the United States Energy Secretary concerning the requirements of the mutual defense agreement in respect of plutonium supplies to the United States by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Luce: Her Majesty's ambassador to the United States has forwarded a copy of the report to Congress of 17 May 1984 by Mr. Dingell of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. The ambassador keeps my right hon. and learned Friend fully informed on such questions.

Namibia

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in view of the position on questions relating to Namibia of the United Kingdom as a contact group member, he will withdraw United Kingdom funding from all United Nations agencies which allocate funds to SWAPO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom has an obligation under the United Nations Charter to contribute to the regular budget of the United Nations, whatever expenditures this may cover. We have a similar obligation to contribute to the assessed budgets of the United Nations specialised agencies of which we are a member. Membership of the contact group does not affect those obligations. However, in common with our partners in the contact group, we have consistently abstained on United Nations General Assembly resolutions authorising explicit provision of financial assistance to SWAPO through any United Nations body.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government intend to do about the renewal of the non-proliferation treaty in August/September 1985; and if they intend to propose any changes.

Mr. Luce: The object of next year's non-proliferation treaty review conference is

"to review the operation of this Treaty with a view to assuring that the purposes of the Preamble and the provisions of the Treaty are being realised",

in accordance with article VIII (3). The question of renewing the treaty does not arise until 1995, as provided for in article X(2). Our policy towards the 1985 review conference was explained in my answer of 17 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Best) at column *30*.

Extradition

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with what countries the United Kingdom does not have an extradition treaty.

Mr. Renton: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki) on 27 November at column *450-1*.

SCOTLAND

Woodland (Sales)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many acres of woodland have been sold by the Forestry Commission during each of the past five financial years; what have been the annual receipts from such sales; and what are the estimated total sales and receipts for 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Tourist Board (Budget)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the budget of the Scottish Tourist Board in the present financial year; and what were the figures for the previous three financial years.

Mr. Younger: The information is given in the following table:

Year	*£ million*
1981-82	6·1
1982-83	7·6
1983-84	7·9
1984-85	9·2

Provision for each year comprises a general grant-in-aid and an allocation of funds for assistance to tourist projects under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969.

Youth Training Scheme (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the name and number of managing agents under the youth training scheme in Dundee, the number on each scheme and the fees being paid to managing agents in total.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The names of the 73 managing agents operating in Dundee, including those which are organised on a GB or all-Scotland basis, and details of the numbers of youngsters currently in training are:

Managing Agent	*Number of Trainees**
1. LOCALLY NEGOTIATED SCHEMES	
Tayside Road Transport Group Training Association	81
Tayside Regional Council	130
Blackness Training Company	62
Dundee Football Club	3
Link Organisation	29
Dundee District Council	15
Tayside Regional Council	58
Keyboard Training Services	101
Dundee Engineering Training Group	41
Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce	66
Dundee College of Technology	5
Henry Boot and Sons	53
National Hairdressing Federation	4
Hilston Manufacturing Chemist	—
Michelin Tyre Company	4
2. SCHEMES NEGOTIATED AT GB LEVEL BY THE MANPOWER SERVICES COMMISSION'S LARGE COMPANIES UNIT	
B & Q Retail	—
Debenhams	16
Construction Industry Training Board	102

Managing Agent	Number of Trainees*
Postal Board	—
Timber Trade Training Association	—
Boots Company	4
Fine Fare	12
Argyll Stores	—
Abbey National Building Society	—
Littlewoods Organisation	2
Thorn EMI	—
BP Petroleum Development	1
Marks and Spencer	4
British Association of Professional Hairdressing Employers	2
Association of British Travel Agents	1
Wm. Timpson	6
Shoe Repair Industry Training Association	1
Cosma Holdings	4
Halifax Building Society	1
Florida Shoes	1
Foster Menswear	1
National Institute of Hardware	—
K Shoes	—
Booker McConnell	—
British Gas	—
British Insurance Brokers	—
Burtons	—
International Thomson Organisation	—
Office Machines and Equipment Federation	—
C & A Modes	—
Drinks Industry Training Association	—
Serck Services	1
Lucas World Services	—
Tyre Services GB	—
Newey & Eyre	—
STC Distributors	1
Federation of Bakers	—
British Telecom	5
Plastic Processing Industry Training Board	—
Engineering Industry Training Board	7
Trustee Savings Bank	—
3. SCHEMES NEGOTIATED AT SCOTLAND LEVEL BY MANPOWER SERVICES COMMISSION'S SCOTTISH OPERATIONS SUPPORT UNIT	
North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board	8
Scottish Plumbers Training Services	15
John Menzies	10
Scottish Grocery Trade Training Association	105
Co-op Wholesale Society	3
Lawson Fisher	5
Hotel Catering Industry Training Board	22
Scottish Motor Traders Association	20
Scottish Print	2
Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association	4
Scottish Association of Master Bakers	5
Barlow Handling	—
Stevenson College	1
Scottish Retail Distributors Association	3
Church of Scotland Department of Social Responsibility	—
George Boyd	2
Kwik Fit Euro	—

* Includes both 1983-84 and 1984-85 entrants.

Fees payable to managing agents will vary according to a number of factors. Each place included in a formal contract attracts a fee of £100. In addition, and provided certain current requirements are met, £39 per week is made available to the agent as long as a place remains filled.

Museums and Galleries (Purchase Grants)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the individual amounts for purchase grants to be allocated to the national museums and galleries in Scotland for the year 1985-86.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 20 December the overall provision for the Scottish national institutions in 1985-86, subject as usual to Parliamentary approval. The individual purchase grant allocations for 1985-86 are as follows:

	£
National Galleries of Scotland	1,439,000
National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland	194,000
Royal Scottish Museum	397,000
National Library of Scotland	665,000
Local Museum Purchase Fund	183,000
Local Museum Purchase Fund (Science)	27,000

Orkney and Shetland (Regional Aid)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many non oil-related projects in *(a)* Orkney and *(b)* Shetland were given regional selective assistance; and what was the total value of such assistance between August 1980 and November 1984.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Between August 1980 and November 1984 no regional selective assistance was given under the Industry Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1982 to any non oil-related project in either Orkney or Shetland. The Highlands and Islands Development Board has, however, under section 8 of the Highlands and Islands Development (Scotland) Act 1965, provided financial assistance amounting to £6,576,845 to non oil-related projects in Orkney and £5,542,203 to non oil-related projects in Shetland between August 1980 and November 1984. Figures on the number of non oil-related projects assisted by HIDB for the period in question are however not available.

Assisted Places Scheme (Minister's Correspondence)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Scottish Education Minister to the hon. Member for Dundee, West on 6 December regarding the latest allocation of assisted places in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The text of my letter is as follows:

Ernie Ross Esq MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A OAA

6 December 1984

You will recall that the Secretary of State was unable to reply fully to 3 Parliamentary Questions about the Assisted Places Scheme, which you tabled towards the end of the last session. The interim replies were published on 23 and 25 October, (Official Reports, Vol 65, No 207, Written Answers Col 546 and Vol 65, No 209, Written Answers Col 675) but statistics for the current school session did not become available in time for publication in Hansard before the Prorogation.
Hence this letter.

You asked the Secretary of State—

1. What has been the number and percentage of places awarded under the assisted places scheme to pupils already attending grant-aided or independent schools in the latest school session in Scotland; and what are the corresponding figures for each participating school;

2. If he will publish in the Official Report a table concerning the assisted places scheme for each participating school showing (a) the number of places made available, (b) the number of applications for places

and (c) the number and percentage of applications from parents for children already attending a fee-paying school and the corresponding information for Scotland in total; and

3. What is the current number and percentage of places at schools participating in the assisted places scheme expressed in terms of the school roll in each case.

You will recall from the Secretary of State's earlier reply that the information which you required in Parts (b) and (c) of the second Question is not collected centrally. The information now available in reply to all 3 Questions is in the enclosed tables.

Allan Stewart

QUESTIONS 1 AND 2

	Total number of pupils in the scheme in session 1984-85 (provisional)	*Pupils in col. 1 attending a fee-paying school before entry to the scheme*	*Col. 2 as percentage of col. 1*
Albyn school for girls, Aberdeen	10	10	100
Belmont House school, Newton Mearns	5	—	—
Craigholme school for girls, Glasgow	22	21	95
Convent of the Sacred Heart school, Kilgraston, Perthshire	34	12	35
Daniel Stewart's and Melville college, Edinburgh Mary Erskine school, Edinburgh George Watson's college, Edinburgh	445	301	68
Dollar academy	38	22	58
Edinburgh academy	30	19	63
Fernhill school, Glasgow	23	5	22
Fettes college, Edinburgh	20	3	15
Fort Augustus Abbey school	33	12	36
George Heriot's school, Edinburgh	178	90	51
Glasgow academy	41	28	68
Gordonstoun school, Morayshire	17	7	41
The High school of Dundee	136	69	51
The High school of Glasgow	49	11	22
Hutcheson's grammar school, Glasgow	128	78	61
Keil school, Dumbarton	47	13	28
Kelvinside academy, Glasgow	39	33	85
Kilquhanity House school, Castle Douglas	13	—	—
Laurel Bank school, Glasgow	43	22	51
Lomond school, Helensburgh	30	15	50
Loretto school, Musselburgh	20	11	55
Merchiston Castle school, Edinburgh	33	19	58
Morrison's academy, Crieff	158	79	50
The Park school, Glasgow	44	20	45
Rannoch school, Perthshire	18	8	44
Robert Gordon's college, Aberdeen	51	28	55
Rudolf Steiner school of Edinburgh	51	41	80
St. Aloysius' college, Glasgow	129	81	63
St. Columba's school, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire	34	23	68
St. Denis and Cranley school, Edinburgh	12	7	58
St. George's school for girls, Edinburgh	8	6	75
St. Leonard's school, St. Andrews	20	18	90
St. Margaret's convent school, Edinburgh	13	7	54
St. Margaret's school for girls, Aberdeen	14	7	50
St. Margaret's school for girls, Edinburgh	44	26	59
Strathallan school, Forgandenny, Perthshire	20	9	45
Glenalmond college, Perthshire	28	12	43
Wellington school, Ayr	19	13	68
Westbourne school for girls, Glasgow	76	36	47
	2,173	1,222	56

Question 3

	Total number of assisted pupils in the scheme in session 1984-85 (Provisional)	*Number of assisted pupils as percentage of school roll*
Albyn School for Girls, Aberdeen	10	2·1
Belmont House School, Newton Mearns	5	1·8
Craigholme School for Girls, Glasgow	22	3·5
Convent of the Sacred Heart School, Kilgraston, Perthshire	34	16·2
Daniel Stewart's and Melville College, Edinburgh Mary Erskine School, Edinburgh George Watson's College, Edinburgh	445	10·2
Dollar Academy	38	3·7
Edinburgh Academy	30	3·0
Fernhill School, Glasgow	23	7·9

	Total number of assisted pupils in the scheme in session 1984-85 (Provisional)	Number of assisted pupils as percentage of school roll
Fettes College, Edinburgh	20	3·8
Fort Augustus Abbey School	33	35·9
George Heriot's School, Edinburgh	178	13·0
Glasgow Academy	41	4·5
Gordonstoun School, Morayshire	17	3·7
The High School of Dundee	136	12·0
The High School of Glasgow	49	5·5
Hutcheson's' Grammar School, Glasgow	128	8·0
Keil School, Dumbarton	47	33·8
Kelvinside Academy, Glasgow	39	5·6
Kilquhanity House School, Castle Douglas	13	44·8
Laurel Bank School, Glasgow	43	10·6
Lomond School, Helensburgh	30	6·2
Loretto School, Musselburgh	20	5·1
Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh	33	9·6
Morrison's Academy, Crieff	158	18·5
The Park School, Glasgow	44	11·0
Rannoch School, Perthshire	18	6·7
Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen	51	4·4
Rudolf Steiner School of Edinburgh	51	15·4
St. Aloysius' College, Glasgow	129	12·4
St. Columba's, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire	34	9·0
St. Denis & Cranley School, Edinburgh	12	5·1
St. George's School for Girls, Edinburgh	8	0·9
St. Leonard's School, St. Andrews	20	4·5
St. Margaret's Convent School, Edinburgh	13	6·1
St. Margaret's School for Girls, Aberdeen	14	3·1
St. Margaret's School for Girls (Edinburgh)	44	5·1
Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perthshire	20	4·2
Glenalmond College, Perthshire	28	7·1
Wellington School, Ayr	19	3·7
Westbourne School for Girls, Glasgow	76	23·3

International Year of Youth

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support will be given to assisting activities under the International Year of Youth 1985.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Grants given to the national co-ordinating committee for Scotland for the period 1 April 1983 to 31 March 1985 amount to £34,794. the financial support to be given for the year 1985-86 has not yet been determined.

Regional Development Grant

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been paid out in regional development grants for *(a)* oil related projects and *(b)* other projects in the Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline travel-to-work areas in each year since 1979; and how many companies have benefited.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. 25-6.]: I regret that the information requested is not available. Statistics relating to regional development grant paid before 29 November 1984 are only available for payments of £25,000 or more and these amounts have been published in *British Business* under employment office areas (EOA's) rather than travel-to-work areas (TTWA's). The present TTWA's of Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy comprise the former EOA's of Cowdenbeath, Glenrothes, Glenrothes New Town, Kirkcaldy and Leven and Methil, but part of Leven and Methil ceased to be a development area on 1 August 1980. The table shows the totals of regional development grants over £25,000 paid in each year since 1979 in these EOA's, split between grants paid to oil related industries and to other industries. The grants were paid to 87 companies.

	£'000 Oil-related Industries	£'000 Other Industries
1979	—	2,625
1980	—	2,078
1981	—	4,285
1982	3,490	4,685
1983	35,472	3,721
*1984	13,129	2,991
TOTALS	52,091	20,385

* to September.

ENVIRONMENT

Council House Sales

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing, for England, the gross receipts from sales of council homes under the right-to-buy policy, for the years 1979-80 to the latest available year.

Sir George Young: Amounts of initial capital receipts from all sales of council houses by English local authority and new towns since 1979-80 are set out as follows. No separate information is available for sales under the right to buy.

	£ million
1979-80	126·3
1980-81	193·4
1981-82	548·0
1982-83	1,046·0
1983-84*	1,023·0

* Provisional.

Agricultural Buildings (Rating)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to reintroduce rating of agricultural buildings.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Rents

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the average percentage increase in rents of local authority housing which is being proposed for the coming year; and if he will list the percentage increases being proposed by Wirral metropolitan district.

Sir George Young: I refer to the answer given to my hon. Friend on 18 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) at column 92. It is for individual authorities to decide their own rent increases.

Endangered Species

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has received from the Scientific Authority for Animals concerning the proposed cessation of the production of annual reports detailing the trade in animals and their products between the member states of the European Community which are controlled by the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora; and when he received such advice.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Nature Conservancy Council, as the scientific authority for animals, has not offered me advice on the matter stated in the question. However, the NCC has supported the arrangements which my Department have made in liaison with HM Customs and Excise to maintain close checks on live animals and products of endangered species entering the United Kingdom from either EC or non-EC countries. The results are reassuring.

Metropolitan County Councils (Legal Responsibilities)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Acts and regulations which have come into force since April 1974, the enforcement of which has fallen upon the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Staff (Salaries)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of his staff based at Marsham street have salaries in excess of £20,000 per annum; and what percentage of the total salary bill for that office that forms.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: For the headquarters offices in Marsham street the figures are some 7·5 per cent. and 18 per cent. respectively.

Regional Water Authorities (Staff Salaries)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of staff employed by regional water authorities earn in excess of £20,000 per annum.

Mr. Macfarlane: Based on salaries with effect from 1 July 1984 and employee numbers at 1 April 1984, the Water Authorities Association calculates that 1·4 per cent. of all employees of regional water authorities earn basic salaries above £20,000 per annum.

West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the percentage change in the numbers of people employed by West Yorkshire metropolitan county council in the latest year for which he has figures available compared to 1974-75, excluding uniformed police and fire service personnel and probation and after-care officers.

Mr. Waldegrave: The available information is as follows:

West Yorkshire metropolitan county council—change in number of employees June 1979 to June 1984

	Number	*per cent.*
Full-time employees	−299	−6·5
Part-time employees	−54	−5·4
Total employees	−353	−6·3

Note: These figures exclude uniformed police, cadets, traffic wardens, police civilians, fire service personnel, the staff of magistrates courts, and probation and aftercare staff.

Manpower figures relating to individual authorities for periods as long ago as 1974-75 are not held centrally.

Housing Stock

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown by region of the percentage of the housing stock which is *(a)* owner-occupied, *(b)* privately-rented and *(c)* rented from a local authority or new town and compare these figures with those of 10 years previously.

Sir George Young: A comparison of this kind was published in table 3.3 of "Regional Trends 1984" for the years 1972 and 1982. 1983 estimates of the tenure of stock in each region were published in table 9.4 of "Housing and Construction Statistics 1973-1983". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the percentage of the total housing stock in the United Kingdom, in England, and in the north west which is *(a)* needing repairs but not unfit for habitation, *(b)* unfit for habitation but not in serious disrepair and *(c)* unfit for habitation and in serious disrepair; and how these figures compare with those of five years previously.

Sir George Young: Estimates based on local authority housing investment programme returns for 1984 and the earliest year (1980) for which comparable information was collected are as follows:

	England		*North West*	
	1980	*1984*	*1980*	*1984**
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
Unfit dwellings	3·1	3·2	3·3	3·2
Dwellings not unfit but in need of renovation†	10·7	12·4	13·5	15·1

* Including Cumbria.

† Defined as needing more than £2,000 expenditure (£3,000 in Greater London) for 1980 and more than £3,000 (£4,200 in Greater London) for 1984.

Information on the relationship between repair costs and unfitness is contained in the part I of the report of the English House Conditions Survey 1981. A copy is in the Library. Similar information for the United Kingdom is not available.

Housing Renovations

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown by region of the number of dwellings renovated with the aid of grant subsidy by *(a)* local authorities and new towns, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private owners and tenants in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: Regional figures of renovations for 1973 to 1982, together with provisional figures for 1983, were published in table 7.2 of 'Housing and Construction Statistics 1973-1983'. Final figures for 1983 were published in table 2.15 of 'Housing and Construction Statistics Part 2, No. 18'. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mains Water and Sewerage

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown by region of the percentage of domestic dwellings supplied by *(a)* mains water and *(b)* mains sewerage in each of the last 10 years.

Sir George Young: The available information relates to the percentage of the population in each water authority area in England and Wales where these services were supplied.

Percentage of population with mains water and mains sewerage

Water authority	*Mains water**		*Mains sewerage*	
	1978-79	*1983-84*	*1978-79*	*1983-84*
North West	99·1	99·1	97·0	97·0
Northumbrian	99·0	99·2	98·4	98·4
Severn Trent	99·2	99·2	96·0	96·4
Yorkshire	99·3	99·3	97·4	92·4
Anglian	98·9	98·9	91·6	91·5
Thames	99·9	100·0	97·6	97·8
Southern	99·5	99·6	94·9	95·4
Wessex	97·4	97·5	90·9	91·1
South West	92·4	94·7	86·8	87·0
Welsh	97·4	97·5	93·6	93·7
All authorities	98·2	99·0	95·6	95·7

* Excludes population resident in areas supplied by water companies.

Royal Parks

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to transfer the royal parks in London to the London boroughs.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Rate Support Grant (Hertfordshire)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Hertfordshire county council regarding the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend received several representations from the county council, which he considered before announcing the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86 on 11 December. The settlement includes a particular change, advocated by the council, in the method of allowing for the Metropolitan police precept in parts of the Metropolitan police district outside Greater London.

Rate Support Grant (Welwyn Hatfield)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Welwyn Hatfield district council regarding the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I met members of the council in July, when they expressed views on various aspects of the rate support grant system, which my right hon. Friend considered carefully before announcing the settlement on 11 December. The settlement includes some of the suggestions advocated by the council.

Metropolitan County Councils (Abolition)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown of the 900 new posts which will be created in the bodies which will take over certain functions currently performed by the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils after their proposed abolition; which specific bodies will be accommodating these new posts; and what will be the range of their levels of pay.

Sir George Young: The figure of 900 given in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Local Government Bill derives from an estimate of the present number of posts in the services that are to be transferred to non-departmental bodies, ie the Arts Council, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, the Thames water authority, and a trustee body to be set up for Merseyside museums and art galleries. It will, in general, be for those bodies to determine in due course the precise numbers, grades and pay of the staff they take on.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fourth Generation Computer Languages

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will consider a Government-backed scheme to encourage the use of fourth generation computer languages, similar to the National Computing Centre-administered start scheme for real time software.

Mr. Butcher: The initiative to encourage software tools for application to large real-time systems (STARTS) was launched by the Department earlier this year since real-time software is recognised to be complex and in need of development methods and tools. An essential part of the initiative to stimulate suppliers to adopt improved software methods has been the setting up of the STARTS public purchasers' group whose primary interests are in large real-time systems. It does not involve direct Departmental assistance to either suppliers or users.

The Department has no plans at present to launch a similar initiative for other types of software. However many of the tools relevant to real-time systems are applicable also to the management of any large software project, hence STARTS will have relevance for a range of software users. Fourth-generation languages may need to be considered within this context though their application tends to be primarily related to more straightforward data-processing applications.

Projects aimed at developing specific 'fourth-generation languages' have received assistance from the Department's software products scheme, which is also administered by the NCC. Under this scheme costs of marketing the products are eligible for assistance.

The hon. Members' suggestion will be considered within the review of support for innovation that is taking place during the current moratorium on such assistance.

Vauxhall Cars (UK Content)

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek further discussions with Vauxhall Motors Ltd, with a view to increasing the United Kingdom content of Vauxhall cars.

Mr. Butcher: I should very much welcome a higher level of British content in the cars produced in the United Kingdom by Vauxhall Motors and increased sales by United Kingdom suppliers to General Motors' operations elsewhere in Europe. This is the subject of discussions between my Department and the company.

Royal Princess Liner

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any public funds have been made available either by way of grant or loan towards the building of the liner Royal Princess.

Mr. Butcher: No.

US (Aircraft Exports)

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to assist British exporters in those parts of the United States civilian and military aircraft market which are at present closed to European imports.

Mr. Channon: The European Community and the United States enjoy open access to each others civil aircraft market under the terms of the GATT agreement on trade in civil aircraft, to which both are signatories. British industry receives considerable support from the Ministry of Defence in marketing defence products in the United States, and, under the umbrella of the 1975 United States/United Kingdom memorandum of understanding relating to the principles governing co-operation in research and development production and procurement of defence equipment. British aircraft manufacturers have in 1984 obtained significant contracts from both the United States air force and navy.

Christmas Cards (Non-charitable Organisations)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation making it a criminal offence for non-charitable organisations to post Christmas cards and subsequently to seek payment for them with the implication that the money raised will go to charity when in reality it is retained by those companies.

Mr. Fletcher: No. There is already legislation to protect individuals who are sent unsolicited goods. Under the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971, the recipients are under no obligation to pay for such items or to return them.

Loan Guarantee and Business Expansion Schemes

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the failure rate for firms which have received assistance under the loan guarantee scheme and the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Trippier: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

EC (Trade Statistics)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing for the last eight six-monthly periods for which figures are available, for each member state of the European Economic Community and for the European Community as a whole, the level of exports to other European Economic Community member states, level of exports to outside the European Economic Community, level of imports from other European Economic Community states and level of imports from outside the European Economic Community.

Mr. Channon: Data up to March 1984, the most recent date for which information for all the Community countries is readily available, are in the tables.

(a) Intra Exports

Billion ECU's

Six months ending	*European Community*	*United Kingdom*	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*France*	*Italy*	*Netherlands*	*Belgium/ Luxembourg*	*Ireland*	*Denmark*	*Greece*
September 1980	124·2	17·0	33·2	20·2	13·4	18·3	16·0	2·3	3·0	0·8
March 1981	131·2	19·1	34·2	21·3	13·4	20·4	16·5	2·2	3·3	0·9
September 1981	135·9	18·9	36·4	21·5	14·7	20·9	16·9	2·5	3·3	0·9

Six months ending	European Community	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	France	Italy	Netherlands	Belgium/ Luxembourg	Ireland	Denmark	Greece
March 1982	155·7	21·5	41·9	23·6	17·0	25·3	19·1	2·6	3·7	1·0
September 1982	152·1	21·0	42·5	22·0	17·1	23·5	18·4	3·0	3·8	1·0
March 1983	163·8	21·6	45·7	24·2	17·7	26·1	20·3	3·0	4·2	1·0
September 1983	162·5	21·9	44·2	24·3	18·2	25·4	19·7	3·4	4·3	1·2
March 1984	188·7	26·1	50·2	28·5	21·0	30·3	22·6	3·7	4·6	1·7

(b) Extra Exports

Billion ECU's

Six months ending	European Community	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	France	Italy	Netherlands	Belgium/ Luxembourg	Ireland	Denmark	Greece
September 1980	105·9	22·7	34·1	18·6	13·4	6·6	6·1	0·8	2·9	0·9
March 1981	117·7	25·8	36·7	21·1	15·1	7·2	6·6	0·8	3·4	1·0
September 1981	134·1	27·6	40·9	23·9	20·0	8·3	7·3	1·1	3·9	1·2
March 1982	144·7	29·7	46·7	24·7	20·9	8·7	7·5	1·1	4·2	1·3
September 1982	140·1	29·6	45·6	23·2	19·4	8·4	7·4	1·2	3·9	1·2
March 1983	147·2	29·8	47·6	25·5	19·9	9·4	8·4	1·2	4·3	1·1
September 1983	147·3	29·3	47·8	25·2	20·9	9·3	7·9	1·5	4·5	1·0
March 1984	169·4	32·7	54·8	28·3	24·6	10·6	9·9	1·6	5·5	1·5

(c) Intra Imports

Billion ECU's

Six months ending	European Community	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	France	Italy	Netherlands	Belgium/ Luxembourg	Ireland	Denmark	Greece
September 1980	123·0	16·1	31·8	22·6	15·4	14·6	14·9	2·8	3·3	1·5
March 1981	129·7	16·2	33·4	25·0	16·2	14·5	16·1	3·2	3·6	1·5
September 1981	135·9	19·1	34·4	24·9	16·7	15·4	16·0	3·6	3·7	2·2
March 1982	152·1	20·8	38·8	29·7	18·6	16·4	17·5	3·8	4·1	2·4
September 1982	151·2	21·6	38·4	28·4	18·0	17·3	17·5	3·6	4·2	2·3
March 1983	162·2	22·5	40·7	32·8	18·4	18·2	19·3	3·6	4·4	2·4
September 1983	164·1	24·5	42·4	29·5	19·0	18·2	20·1	3·6	4·4	2·4
March 1984	185·6	27·1	47·6	35·1	21·3	20·2	22·2	4·2	4·9	2·9

(d) Extra Imports

Billion ECU's

Six months ending	European Community	United Kingdom	Federal Republic of Germany	France	Italy	Netherlands	Belgium/ Luxembourg	Ireland	Denmark	Greece
September 1980	132·8	25·7	34·5	24·1	20·0	12·3	9·6	1·0	3·4	2·1
March 1981	141·0	26·3	36·6	26·5	20·8	13·6	10·6	1·0	3·7	1·9
September 1981	154·8	29·4	37·8	27·9	26·4	14·1	11·6	1·2	4·1	2·2
March 1982	161·0	30·5	39·9	29·3	26·2	14·4	11·6	1·2	4·6	3·2
September 1982	158·1	32·2	39·5	28·0	25·1	14·2	11·3	1·2	4·2	2·3
March 1983	161·9	30·1	41·1	30·1	25·1	15·7	11·4	1·4	4·7	2·3
September 1983	159·7	32·8	41·7	26·3	24·9	15·5	10·3	1·4	4·4	2·4
March 1984	183·4	35·6	47·5	29·5	28·7	18·8	12·8	1·6	5·5	3·3

Note: £1 = approximately 1·7 ECU's
Source: Eurostat Monthly External Trade Bulletin

Industrial Capacity

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on the current level of capacity utilisation in industry within the member states of the EEC and the EEC as a whole;

(2) if he will make a statement on the level of productive potential in EEC member states and within the EEC as a whole.

Mr. Channon [*pursuant to the reply*, 20 December 1984 c. *273*]: Data on productive potential in the Community are not readily available. Information on production capacity and untilization are given regularly in "Results of the business survey carried out among managements in the Community" published by the European Community Commission (Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs). The results of the latest survey are in table O of th October 1984 edition. A copy of this publication is in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Victor Paige (Responsibilities)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the the Prime Minister whether the responsibilities of Mr. Paige, chairman of the Health Service management board, are limited to the National Health Service in England; and what provision has been made for the implementation of the Griffiths Report in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Fowler: I have been asked to reply.

Mr. Paige's responsibilities, like my own with regard to the National Health Service, are indeed limited to England.

The implementation of the Griffiths report in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for those countries. I understand, however, that the position is as follows.

In Northern Ireland it is not proposed to appoint a general manager of the health and personal social services and the permanent secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services will continue to fulfill his current responsibilities for the management of the services as accounting officer. A review of the top structure of the Department is underway with the objective of establishing a framework which will assist in the exercise of those responsibilities. On 12 December the Department published a circular which requires health and social services boards to appoint, by 1 April 1985, general managers at area level.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland issued a consultative paper in June 1984 on the introduction of the general management function in Scotland. In August, a new under-secretary post was created in the Scottish Home and Health Department with responsibility for National Health Service management, finance and operational planning.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has accepted that the principles of the inquiry team's report apply equally to the National Health Service in Wales, and he has taken action to strengthen the general management function at all levels of the service. Details are set out in Welsh Office circular WHC(84)15, a copy of which is in the Library.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pensions and Annuities

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the lump sum that would currently be required to purchase for a woman at 60 years of age a life annuity, to be uprated together with the retail price index and secured on Government indexed stock, of equivalent value to a single woman's retirement pension;

(2) what is the lump sum that would currently be required to purchase for a man at 65 years of age a life annuity, to be uprated together with the retail price index and secured on Government indexed stock, of equivalent value to a married man's national insurance retirement pension.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that the Department does not keep details of commercial annuity rates, nor am I in a position to confirm that annuities of the type described in the question are in fact available.

National Insurance Pensions

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the incomes at qualifying age for national insurance pensions of a man entitled to married person's pension and of a single woman who also draw annuities as beneficiaries of a normal public service pension scheme after a fully qualifying period of service at their respective national average rates of wages.

Mr. Whitney: I regret the information requested is not available.

Invalidity Pensioners

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for *(a)* the average amount of additional component received by invalidity pensioners for (i) all invalidity pensioners and (ii) each of the groups receiving one of the rates of invalidity allowance and *(b)* for each of the three rates of invalidity allowance, a breakdown of the amount of earnings-related component (1) up to £1, (2) £1 to £2, (3) £2 to £3, (4) £3 to £4 and (5) up to the maximum point.

Mr. Newton: The information on *(a)* as at 2 April 1983, the latest date for which information is available, is as follows:

(a)	*(i)*	*(ii)*		
	All IVB pensioners	*IVB pensioners receiving IVA at*		
		Higher rate	*Middle rate*	*Lower rate*
	£	£	£	£
Average amount of additional component in payment per week	2·63	1·80	2·46	2·88

IVA=Invalidity allowance.
IVB=Invalidity benefit.

I regret that a breakdown of the amount of additional component in payment is not available.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for *(a)* the number of invalidity pensioners receiving each of the three rates of invalidity allowance, *(b)* for each of these three groups the number also receiving an earnings-related additional component, *(c)* the total number of invalidity pensioners receiving both invalidity allowance and the additional component on top of their invalidity pension, *(d)* of these the number also receiving supplementary benefit, *(e)* the number of invalidity pensioners claiming for an adult dependant and *(f)* the number claiming for a child dependant.

Mr. Newton: The table provides the information requested on the number of invalidity benefit beneficiaries receiving invalidity allowance and the additional component as at 2 April 1983, the latest date for which information is available.

	Higher rate IVA	*Middle rate IVA*	*Lower rate IVA*
(a) Number of IVB beneficiaries receiving IVA	184,000	153,000	281,000
(b) Number of IVB beneficiaries receiving IVA and AC	69,000	60,000	147,000

(c) The total number of IVB beneficiaries receiving both IVA and the additional component is therefore 276,000.
(d) Information on the number of IVB beneficiaries receiving both IVA and AC and supplementary benefit is not readily available.
(e) The number of IVB beneficiaries claiming for an adult dependant is 323,000.
(f) The number of IVB beneficiaries claiming for a child dependant is 112,000 but 78,000 of these beneficiaries also claimed an increase for an adult dependant and are included in the figure in *(e)* above.

I V B =Invalidity benefit
A C =Additional component
I V A =Invalidity allowance.

Sick Pay

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence he has received, including surveys of employee reactions, on the workings of statutory sick pay to date; and how many complaints his Department has received in the last year about statutory sick pay.

Mr. Newton: Staff from the Department's local offices have been visiting all employers to check that the scheme has been understood and is working properly. Although some errors are being made these are generally on minor technical matters which can be expected to improve as employers become more used to the scheme's rules. In the majority of cases checked, the right amount of statutory sick pay has been paid. The Department is also in frequent contact with employers and their representatives. The National Audit Office issued a report on the scheme on 19 November. Work by the Department's policy inspectorate suggests that most employees prefer to receive statutory sick pay rather than state sickness benefit. Information about the numbers of complaints received is not collected, but indications are that these have been relatively few.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for *(a)* the proportion of employees in an occupational sick pay scheme, *(b)* how these break down into (i) full-time and (ii) part-time manual and non-manual workers and low-paid workers where low pay is defined as less than £100 per week, *(c)* the average length of sickness covered in occupational sick pay schemes for each of the groups as in *(b)* and *(d)* the average payment as a proportion of salary/wages for each of the groups as in *(b)*.

Mr. Whitney: Detailed up-to-date figures are not available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Nicorette

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make representations to the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances to review its decision that Nicorette should not be prescribed for patients wishing to stop smoking.

Mr. John Patten: Last month the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances reviewed the status of Nicorette in the light of recent publicity given to this product. It reaffirmed its earlier advice that the value of Nicorette in general practice remains unproven and that it should not therefore be prescribed by general practitioners.

Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances is empowered to advise on prescription—only medicines.

Mr. John Patten: Yes.

Prescriptions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* any other prescription-only medicines, apart from Nicorette, that may not be prescribed on the National Health Service by general practitioners.

Mr. John Patten: Nicorette is the only prescription-only medicine that the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances has advised should not be prescribed by general practitioners.

Cot Deaths

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now in a position to publish the report from the medical care research unit at Sheffield on cot deaths.

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to publish the report on cot deaths he has commissioned from Sheffield university.

Mr. John Patten: We are considering this report.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much, in money and percentage terms, of the overall National Health Service expenditure was spent on *(a)* pay and related costs, *(b)* drugs, medicines, bandages, and so on, *(c)* medical equipment, *(d)* hospital building and maintenance, *(e)* administration and *(f)* general service, and so on, and catering, laundry, and so on, in 1983-84.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The tables give the analysis of health authority current expenditure by function (table 1) and subjectively (i.e. by type) (table 2) for 1983-84. Total capital expenditure by the health authorities whose current expenditure is included in the tables was £713·9 million.

Table 1

Current expenditure by health authorities analysed by function

	1983-84	
	£ million	*per cent.*
A. Patient care services		
i. Medical staff services	764·5	8·86
ii. Nursing staff services	2,875·9	33·34
iii. Other direct treatment services and supplies	769·8	8·93
iv. Diagnostic departments	449·5	5·21
v. Other medical and para medical services, ambulance services etc.	643·4	7·46
Total	5,503·1	63·80
B. General services		
i. Unit administration and clerical support services	514·9	5·97
ii. Medical records	91·9	1·07
iii. Training and education	45·0	0·52
iv. Catering	353·5	4·10
v. Domestic/cleaning	428·8	4·97
vi. Portering	145·3	1·68
vii. Laundry	66·0	0·77
viii. Linen services	108·7	1·26
ix. Transport	44·5	0·51
x. Engineering maintenance	252·2	2·92
xi. Energy and utility services	311·2	3·61
xii. Building maintenance	160·8	1·86
xiii. Grounds and gardens	23·1	0·27
xiv. General estate expenses	154·3	1·79
xv. Miscellaneous services and expenses	4·0	0·05
Total	2,704·2	31·35
C. Other		
i. Headquarters administration	361·2	4·19
ii. Other services and expenses	56·9	0·66
Total	418·1	4·85
D. Total	8,625·4	100·00

Note:

The figures are derived from the annual accounts submitted to the Department by health authorities for 1983-84. They include all current expenditure except that on the family practitioner services, the expenses of the Dental Estimates Board and Prescription Pricing Authority and the costs of other special health authorities providing NHS central services.

Current Expenditure by Health Authorities Analysed Subjectively (ie By Type)

	£ Million	*Per cent.*
A. Pay		
NHS Staff Salaries and Wages	6,352·1	73·65
Non-NHS Staff (Agency etc)	59·8	0·69
Chairman's remuneration	1·7	0·02
Total	6,413·6	74·36
B. Non-Pay		
Drugs	266·6	3·09
Medical Gases	10·4	0·12
Dressings	48·8	0·57
Medical and surgical equipment—purchases and maintenance contracts	279·1	3·23
X-Ray equipment, film and materials—purchases and maintenance contracts	49·9	0·58
Patients' appliances	61·1	0·71
Laboratory equipment, instruments and materials—purchases, maintenance contracts and services	75·9	0·88
Provisions—purchases and contract catering	173·4	2·01
Staff uniforms and patients clothing	41·7	0·48
Fuel, light and power	281·4	3·26
Laundry—equipment, materials and contracts	12·3	0·14
Cleaning—equipment, materials and contracts	37·4	0·43
Engineering maintenance—equipment, materials and contracts	107·7	1·25
Building Maintenance—equipment, materials and contracts	86·8	1·01
Grounds and gardens maintenance—equipment materials and contracts	5·9	0·07
Computers—purchases, maintenance and licencing fees	15·0	0·17
Office equipment	28·9	0·34
Printing, stationary and postage	65·1	0·75
Telephones—rental etc and call charges	66·9	0·78
Transport—fuel and oil, maintenance—equipment, materials and contracts etc	51·7	0·60
Travelling, subsistence and removal expenses	141·9	1·65
Contributions in lieu of rates	127·2	1·47
Contractual arrangements for patient care	34·8	0·40
Other expenses	311·0	3·61
Total	2,380·9	27·60
C. Total Pay and Non-Pay	8,794·5	101·96
Less Direct Credits (Staff lodging charges, canteen and other sales etc).	169·1	1·96
D. Total	8,625·4	100·00

Note: The figures are derived from the annual accounts submitted to the Department by health authorities for 1983-84. They include all current expenditure except that on the family practitioner services, the expenses of the Dental Estimates Board and Prescription Pricing Authority and the costs of other special health authorities providing NHS central services.

F. Hoffmann La Roche & Co., A.G.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the number of drugs which are available as alternatives to each of those supplied to the health Service by F. Hoffmann La Roche & Co., A.G., its subsidiary and associated companies including Roche Products; and what is the percentage by which these alternatives are cheaper or dearer than the F. Hoffmann La Roche products;

(2) whether F. Hoffmann La Roche & Co., A.G. and its associated or subsidiary companies including Roche Products have ever been asked by his Department to reduce the cost of drugs supplied to the National Health

Service or to refund the partial cost of drugs supplied on the grounds of excessive profits being made by the companies.

(3) if he will list the products and medicines supplied to the Health Service by F. Hoffmann La Roche & Co., A.G. and all its subsidiary and associated companies including Roche Products Ltd.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: MIMS, a copy of which I am sending to my hon. Friend, gives details of companies' brand name products by therapeutic class, altenatives which prescribers may wish to consider, and the prices of each. Where generic drugs are available as alternatives to non-patented products, the price to the National Health Service is shown in the Drug Tariff eg Valium 5mg 1000 tablets £13.62, diazepam £2.32; Mogadon 5mg-500 tablets £12.02, nitraxepam £2.20. Leaving aside the reductions of 2·5 per cent. in the prices of National Health Service medicines which all compaines were asked to make in 1983, Roche Products Limited have not been required to reduce prices or make repayments on grounds of excessive profits since the settlement following the Monopolies Commission report on the supply of Chlordiazepoxide and Diazepam in 1973.

Freephone Service (Campbeltown)

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what criteria were applied in determining that a freephone service should be available to claimants and potential claimants in the area served by his Department's Campbeltown office;

(2) what is the annual cost to his Department's budget of the freephone service operated by his Department's office in the Campbeltown area, Argyll.

(3) whether he has any proposals to extend to other parts of Scotland the freephone service currently operated by his Department in the Campbeltown area;

(4) when the freephone service operated by his Department's office in the Campbeltown area started; and how many callers per month avail themselves of the facility.

Mr. Whitney: The telephone service provided by the Department's Campbeltown office for the islands of Islay and Jura began on 1 August 1983. This was an initiative springing from the Department's regional organisation "service to the public" management priority in that year. The background was concern that the service offered to the public had diminished following the withdrawal of the functions formerly provided by administrative agents on the islands on the Department's behalf. An average of 160 calls are received each month at a total annual cost of £1,800. We have at present no plans to extend the service in this and other areas.

Elderly Persons (Cold Weather)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what recommendations he now intends to issue arising from the findings of the Health Education Council concerning the effects of extreme cold upon elderly citizens.

Mr. John Patten: The Health Education Council is funding a three year project ("Your Right To Be Warm") in Leeds. This includes the development of a pack of training materials and information on all aspects of keeping warm. Apart from this project, which is still being evaluated, we are not aware of any findings by the Health Education Council on the effects of extreme cold on elderly people.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has any plans to abolish the housing benefit supplementary scheme.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans, other than those already announced, to make any changes of substance in the housing benefit scheme pending the outcome of the independent review of the scheme.

Social Security Contributions

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of social security contributions collected by his Department have emanated from payments made from United Kingdom citizens resident or working in the United States of America during the last five years.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is not available. For those employees who go to the United States of America to work for an employer who has a place of business in the United Kingdom, normal class 1 contributions are payable for the first 52 weeks abroad. These are recorded in the same way as for employees working in the United Kingdom and no separate record is kept.

For those who pay voluntary contributions, either through an agent in the United Kingdom or by annual payment, the amount recorded is the total received each year in respect of persons abroad. For those who pay by direct debit, the total amount recorded covers people who live in the United Kingdom as well as those living abroad who use this method to pay their contributions.

Rent Rebates and Allowances

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the current estimated total amounts for 1984-85 of rent rebates and rent allowances distinguishing between certificated and non-certificated benefit.

Mr. Whitney: The latest estimates of expenditure on rent rebates and allowances in Great Britain for 1984-85 are as follows:

	Standard £ million	*Certificated £ million*
Rent rebates	743	1,402
Rent allowances	194	440

Retirement Age

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost at unit price levels of a reduction in the retirement age to 60 years.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) on 3 December at column *78*.

Pregnant Women (Dietary Payments)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received a copy of the report "Poverty in Pregnancy" by the Maternity Alliance, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement on the level of dietary payments in respect of pregnant women receiving state benefit.

Mr. Whitney: We have received this report. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 July at columns *375-376*; since then supplementary benefit has been uprated and the adult scale rates are now 6 per cent. higher in real terms than in November 1978.

Drugs List

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the dates of introduction of all the drugs on his proposed limited list of preparations to be available in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Of the medicines included in the provisional list of antacids, laxatives, inhalations, antitussives, analgesics for mild to moderate pain, vitamins, tonics and bitters, and benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers which it is proposed should remain available for prescription on the National Health Service which I gave in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on 10 December at columns *381-82*, all but one were on the market before the start of licensing under the Medicines Act 1968 on 1 September 1971. The exact dates of their introduction are not available from our records.

The first product licences under the Medicines Act, for medicines containing the drug substance temazepam were granted in 1977. The list is of course, provisional and has been published as a basis for consultation. We will not finally decide which drugs will no longer be prescribable at public expense through the National Health Service until after this consultation with the medical and pharmaceutical professions, and the drugs industry, is complete.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what measures he intends to introduce in order to compensate those categories of patients who will no longer be entitled to National Health Service prescriptions, exempt of charges, for those categories of medicines included in the limited list proposals announced recently.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All patients will be entitled to National Health Service prescriptions in all categories of drugs. Doctors will be able to prescribe at National Health Service expense from a limited but adequate range of drugs in those categories of drugs covered by our limited list proposals. If a patient elects to have a private prescription instead that is a matter of choice but not of medical necessity and the question of compensation does not arise.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the £100 million which he hopes to save on the National Health Service drugs bill by his limited list proposals will come from a reduction in the number of free prescriptions as issued under current arrangements.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our initial estimates of savings do not assume any reduction in the number of free prescriptions because there will be no need for any National Health Service patient to seek a private prescription. The limited list will meet all clinical needs.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social services what mechanism he proposes to establish to evaluate the suitability of medicines for prescription under the National Health Service.

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social services what professional advice he proposes to use in finalising his limited list of medicines to be available on the National Health Service.

Mr. Fowler: My main concern is to ensure that, in the categories of minor medicines to which it applies, the limited list of drugs should be sufficient to meet all clinical needs. We are already receiving a large amount of specific evidence on this as part of the consultation process. In assessing this evidence my Chief Medical Officer will consult a number of eminent individuals from the appropriate branches of the medical and pharmaceutical professions, including Professor Alasdair Breckenridge, professor of clinical pharmacology, Liverpool; Professor David Morell, professor of general practice, London; Dr. John Tomlinson, general practitioner, Hampshire; Dr. Duncan Colin Jones, consultant physician, Portsmouth; Professor Malcolm Hodkinson, professor of geriatric medicine, London; Mr. David Coleman, retail pharmacist, Norwich.

The Chief Medical Officer may also wish to involve other specialists on particular points at a later stage.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what alternative methods of saving money on the National Health Service drugs bill he considered before introducing his proposals for a limited list.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Among the alternatives considered were further efforts to encourage generic prescribing and various methods of introducing generic substitution.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the drugs currently available under National Health Service prescription which are not included in the provisional list circulated with the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 14 December to all doctors, indicating those for which a generic alternative will also not be available under prescription under the National Health Service, whether or not a prescription is currently required, and the proportion of current prescriptions for those drugs which are prescribed for people on free prescriptions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Some 18,000 drugs available under the National Health Service were not included in our provisional list but most of them are in therapeutic categories which are not affected in any way by our limited list proposals. It would be pointless and a misuse of resources to list them all. If the hon. Member is interested, I would refer him to the current edition of the British National Formulary which lists all frequently prescribed drugs and indicates for each whether they are prescription only medicines.

Adequate and effective alternatives will be available for all medicines no longer available under the National Health Service from 1 April 1985.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria will be used to determine which medicines will be approved for prescription under the National Health Service after 1 April 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our intention is to provide an adequate range of effective drugs in the therapeutic categories covered by the limited list proposals so that all clinical needs can be met at the lowest reasonable cost.

GPs (Retirement)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider introducing a retirement age for general practitioners.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short), on 17 May at column *258*. We are still considering the matter.

Blindness Addition

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what factors are responsible for the fall in the number of persons receiving the £1.25 blindness addition to supplementary benefit, from 41,000 in December 1982 to 36,000 in December 1983, as revealed by the Department of Health and Social Security's annual statistical inquiry.

Mr. Newton: The number of claimants receiving the blindness addition in December 1983 quoted by my hon. Friend is a provisional estimate and has yet to be confirmed. The largest variation between the figures for the two years is amongst pensioners. The figures relating to pensioners' claims are based on a sample of one case in 200 and because the total number of cases involved is quite small the figures for both years are subject to fairly large sampling errors: the apparent fall may therefore simply be caused by chance in the selection of the sample.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many speech therapists are employed within each regional health authority; what rate per 100,000 of population that represents; and how far current provision of speech therapy meets the recommendations of the committee of inquiry into speech therapy services, the Quirk report, 1972.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The numbers employed by region as at September 1983 (the last available figures) are shown in the table. The staffing levels shown represent an average for England of 4·2 qualified speech therapists per 100,000 of the population. The recommendation of the Quirk committee was that by 1992 the number of qualified staff should be increased to six per 100,000 of the population.

NHS speech therapists as at 30 September 1983

	Staff	*Whole-time Equivalent Staff per 100,000 Population*
Northern RHA	108	3·5
Yorkshire RHA	126	3·5
Trent RHA	183	4·0
East Anglian RHA	89	4·6
NW Thames RHA	171	4·9
NE Thames RHA	175	4·7
SE Thames RHA	181	5·0
SW Thames RHA	129	4·4
Wessex RHA	98	3·5
Oxford RHA	102	4·3
South Western RHA	134	4·3
West Midlands RHA	198	3·8
Mersey RHA	83	3·4
North Western RHA	187	4·7
Total England	1,963*†	4·2

* Owing to rounding the sum of the Regional figures may differ from the total shown.

† Excludes 10 speech therapists working in London Post-graduate teaching hospitals.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many clinical psychologists are employed within each regional health authority; and how the figure for each region compares with the norm of 1:25,000 proposed by the 1977 report of the sub-committee of the standing advisory committee, chaired by Professor Trethowan.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 18 December at column *144*. The data presented there are the latest available. The ratio of clinical psychologists to population quoted in the question was that given in evidence by The British Psychological Society and was not included in the Trethowan committee's recommendations.

Spectacles

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to issue for consultation a draft order under the Health and Social Security Act 1984 to amend the National Health Service Act 1977 ending general National Health Service subsidies for spectacles; and how long he anticipates the consultation period will then be before the order is placed before Parliament.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are almost ready to begin consultation of interested organisations on the contents of the proposed regulations. An adequate consultation period will be allowed to enable them to come into operation on 1 April 1985.

Visually Handicapped People

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any further plans to protect the visually handicapped when the provisions of the Health and Social Security Act 1984 are fully implemented.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Nurses (Back Pain)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to collect information on the incidence of back pain amongst nurses.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Our first priority is to consider the results of research carried out by the University of Surrey on the incidence and prevalence of back pain among nurses together with that of the Health and Safety Commission and other reports with a view to considering what further advice can usefully be given to health authorities.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to extend the consultation period during which area health authorities are required to report on combating drug abuse in their areas.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Birth Statistics

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of total births and live births are illegitimate; what are the perinatal, neonatal, post neonatal and infant mortality rates for illegitimate babies according to the latest available figures; and whether he has any plans to modify the basis on which the social class of babies is categorised so as to include within such categorisation babies born to single mothers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The table shows rates based upon births occurring in England and Wales during 1983.

	Number
Illegitimate live and still births per 1,000 live and still births	158
Illegitimate live births per 1,000 live births	158
Perinatal deaths per 1,000 illegitimate live and still births	13·1
Neonatal deaths per 1,000 illegitimate live births	7·4
Post-neonatal deaths per 1,000 illegitimate live births	5·9
Infant deaths per 1,000 illegitimate live births	13·3

Illegitimate births which are registered jointly by both parents are already classified by the father's social class. Illegitimate births registered by the mother alone are, where possible, classified by the mother's social class, but for nearly three quarters of such cases the information on occupation needed to do this is not, or cannot, be supplied. There are no plans at present to modify the existing basis on which births are analysed by social class of parents, but consideration is being given to obtaining more information on the occupation of mothers when births are registered.

Illegitimacy

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what proportion of illegitimate births the father is formally identified.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Details of the father were recorded in the birth registers for 61·3 per cent. of illegitimate births occurring in England and Wales during 1983.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations are planned on the details of the proposed extension of statutory sick pay from eight to 28 weeks.

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations are planned on the details of the proposed extension of statutory sick pay from eight to 28 weeks.

Mr. Newton: The Department has issued a consultation paper seeking views on these proposals. Copies of the paper have been sent to the Confederation of British Industry, Trades Union Congress, British Medical Association and other interested organisations, including those representing the interests of disabled people. Comments have been requested by the end of January 1985. I am arranging for copies of the paper to be sent to Standing Committee members serving on the Social Security Bill and for a copy to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Contraception (Court of Appeal Judgment)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement following yesterday's judgment in the Court of Appeal in the case of Mrs. Gillick *v.* the West Norfolk and Wisbech health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We shall be considering all the very wide implications of the judgment. Our Department has been granted leave to appeal to the House of Lords and intends to do so. It is plainly in the public interest that the law should be made clear by a ruling from the highest court. We hope it will be possible for the case to be heard quickly.

We are bringing the Court of Appeal's decision to the attention of doctors, health authorities and others responsible for providing medical services.

For the time being our present guidance relating to the provision of contraceptive and abortion services to young people under 16, is suspended. We shall be reviewing that guidance once the final outcome of the case is known.

Housing Benefit Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the full year cost to the housing benefit scheme if *(a)* November 1983 and *(b)* April 1984 tapers and minima were to apply from November 1984; and how many people would be affected in each case.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 November 1984, column *64*]: Broad estimates on the latest information available, indicate that the full year cost to the housing benefit scheme if the November 1983 tapers and minima were to apply from November 1984 would be about £120 million. Similarly the estimated full year cost if the April 1984 tapers and minima were to apply from November 1984 would be about £43 million. The number of households affected would be about 2·2 million and 1·9 million respectively.

Aspirin and Paracetamol

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the known side effects of aspirin and paracetamol.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *229*]: The adverse effects of aspirin when used for the relief of mild-moderate pain are generally mild and infrequent. There is, however, a

relatively high incidence of gastro-intestinal irritation with slight asymptomatic blood loss. Increased bleeding time can occur, as can bronchospasm and skin reactions in hypersensitive patients. If used regularly in high doses it has an anti-inflammatory effect and in common with other drugs used for this purpose, can have a much higher incidence of gastro-intestinal side-effects such as dyspepsia and gastric bleeding. At high doses, aspirin can also produce auditory side effects such as tinnitus (leading rarely to deafness). As with any medicine, it is for the clinician to balance the likely benefit/risk ratio before deciding what to prescribe.

Adverse effects of paracetamol are rare at therapeutic doses but liver damage arising from long-term use or overdosage has been recorded.

Invalidity Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many invalidity pensioners receive the additional earnings-related component; how much the average addition is; and what steps his Department takes to ensure that claimants know of this addition.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *229*.] The number of invalidity pensioners receiving the additional component was 365,000 as at 2 April 1983, the latest date for which information is available. The average amount of additional component in payment was £2.63 a week. As regard steps to ensure that claimants know about the additional component, the Department writes to each claimant at the 23rd week of incapacity for work and sends a leaflet about invalidity benefit which explains inter alia the earnings-related part of the benefit. The letter also asks about his recent job(s), to assist in determining title to the additional component. When the award is made the claimant is sent an award notice which shows the rate of the additional component separately. With the award notice is another leaflet which also contains a reference to the additional component.

Invalidity Pensioners

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many invalidity pensioners receive a dependency addition *(a)* for a wife and *(b)* for a husband; and what is the highest earnings disregard which could be set if a common earnings disregard were introduced on a nil cost basis.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 23 November 1984, c. *524*.] The limited statistical information available about the number of wives who might successfully claim an increase of invalidity pension for their husbands suggests that a nil cost common earnings rule base on the 100 per cent. taper which applies to male claimants would be set at between £40 and £45.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the net cost of introducing a common earnings rule for adult dependants of invalidity pensioners at *(a)* £45 a week and *(b)* at the real value of the earnings disregard at November 1978.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the latest available figures for the estimated net cost of introducing a common £45 earnings disregard for adult dependants of invalidity pensioners.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the reply*, 28 November 1984, c. *524*.] The net annual cost of a common rule at £45.00 a week is estimated to be about £1 million. The net annual cost of a common rule at £79.50 (the 1978 value) would be of the order of £40 million.

Social Security Reviews

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what subjects the social security policy inspectorate has undertaken inquiries but not yet finalised its reports; and on what date each of these inquiries commenced.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 December 1984, c.*80*]: The social security policy inspectorate has a continuing programme of work, which results in advice to Ministers and Departmental management on a wide range of issues in social security policy and administration. At the present time it has a number of separate studies in progress, including studies into single payments for furniture; national insurance and the self-employed; family income supplement; and statutory sick pay.

Dentists (Treatment costs)

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many dentists provided treatment in 1983 at an average cost of more than twice the national average treatment cost.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to the reply*, 27 November 1984, c.*460*]: In England and Wales in 1983, 1,420 dentists who provided at least 100 courses of treatment under the general dental service had an average cost per course of treatment of more than twice the national average.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 9 January 1985

THE ARTS

Works of Art (Export)

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts whether he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half year ended 31 December 1984, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was eventually exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; whether he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply.

Mr. Waldegrave: The items for which export licences were withheld for a period on the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art are listed as follows. Press notices giving details of the items concerned were issued at the time of my noble Friend's decision in each case. Details of the outcome of these cases will be given in the annual report of the Reviewing Committee for the period in question.

Description	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
A travelling silver canteen of Charles Edward Stuart	175,000	Purchased by the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland
A drawing: "Man Threshing Beside a Wagon", by Sir Peter Paul Rubens	779,520	Licence issued
A drawing: "View on the Amstel", by Rembrandt	668,160	Purchased by the British Museum
A drawing: "Studies for the Disputa", by Raphael	670,000	Licence issued
A drawing: "St. Paul Rending His Garments", by Raphael	1,556,800	Licence issued
A drawing: "Study of a Mans Head and Hand", by Raphael	3,603,600	Licence issued
A page from Vasari's "Libro De' Disegni" with drawings attributed to Filippino Lippi	3,276,000	Licence issued
A drawing: "Extensive Landscape with a Woman", by Titian	414,960	Licence issued
A drawing: "Three Groups of Apostles in a Last Supper", by Sir Peter Paul Rubens	622,720	Licence issued
A drawing: "Two Thatched Cottages" by Rembrandt	365,440	Licence issued
A drawing: "The Bulwark 'De Rose' and the Windmill 'De Smeerpot'", by Rembrandt	522,640	Licence issued
A drawing: "Study for the Entombment", by Sir Anthony Van Dyck	262,080	Licence issued
A drawing: "A Sailing Boat", by Rembrandt	458,640	Licence issued
A drawing: "A Farmstead by a Stream", by Rembrandt	393,120	Licence issued
The Farnley Book of Bird Studies by J. M. W. Turner	223,000	Licence withheld until 13 January 1985
A painting: "The Plague at Athens", by Michiel Sweerts	1,145,038	Licence issued
Four stereoscopic daguerrotypes by Antoine Claudet	12,000	Purchased by Science Museum
A drawing: "A View of Houtewaal", by Rembrandt	436,800	Licence issued
A Viking sword in excavated condition	2,113	Licence withheld until 19 January 1985
A watercolour: "A Cornfield By Moonlight", by Samuel Palmer	200,000	Licence withheld until 28 April 1985
A year-going long case clock by Henry Hindley	10,750	Licence withheld until 28 February 1985
A lead figure of Actaeon or Meleager with a hound attributed to Andrew Carpenter	14,000	Licence withheld until 28 February 1985

Museums and Galleries (Attendance Figures)

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1984 reported by the national museums and galleries in England, broken down to the individual institutions but comprising their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1983.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Works of Art in lieu of Taxation

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts whether he will specify the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half year ended 31 December of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of capital transfer tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed in the matter of allocation

by testators or executors; whether he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of capital transfer tax; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information requested is as follows. The Office of Arts and Libraries will issue a press notice today covering these details.

1. *Items allocated since 1 July 1984:*

Items	*To whom allocated*
Drawings by Sir Jacob Epstein	Birmingham City Museum; Leeds City Art Gallery
*La Pensee' by Auguste-Pierre Renoir	Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham
*Palladius manuscripts	Bodleian Library, Oxford

* This offer carried a condition regarding its allocation which was honoured.

2. *Items awaiting allocation*

Item	*Date of acceptance*
Bonheur du jour by Martin Carlin	7 October 1984
Seneca epistles	24 October 1984

Chatsworth Collection

Mr. Faulds asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State answering in respect of the Arts whether he will list the drawings which, having been sold at auction from the Chatsworth collection on 3 July, were referred to the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art, but in respect of which that committee did not recommend the temporary withholding of an export licence, together with the valuations of the individual items.

Mr. Waldegrave: The details of applications referred to the reviewing committee are treated as confidential, because of their commercial nature, until they have been cleared with the applicants for publication in the committee's report; meanwhile, information is only supplied in respect of licences withheld on the committee's recommendation.

CIVIL SERVICE

Private Medical Insurance Schemes

Mr. Dobson asked the Minister for the Civil Service what studies have been made of the take-up by civil servants of the private medical insurance schemes, details of which were circulated by the last Government; and what information he has on the take-up by grade.

Mr. Hayhoe: No information is available centrally, by grade or otherwise, of the numbers who took up the offer of private medical insurance for civil servants. The material publicising the group discount schemes was distributed by individual Government Departments to their staffs. It was left to those civil servants who wanted to take advantage of one of the schemes to approach the company concerned direct.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Obscene Publications

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General if he will list the books in respect of which prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act has been approved by the Director of Public Prosecutions in each year since 1974.

The Solicitor-General: The volume of material referred each year to the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration of proceedings under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is such that the information requested by the hon. Member can only be obtained at disproportionate expense. I am aware of the particular items with which the hon. Member is concerned and will write to him about these.

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General how many prosecutions of books under the Obscene Publications Act have been authorised by the Director of Public Prosecutions since 1975 against books listed in the edition of *British Books in Print* current at the time of prosecution.

The Solicitor-General: The records maintained by the Director of Public Prosecutions do not contain the information requested by the hon. Member and it could be provided only at disproportionate expense.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Forces (Establishment)

Mr. Lofthouse asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the authorised establishment levels of police officers for each of the metropolitan county forces and the Northumbria force for each year from 1974 to the present.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information is as follows:

Police Force Establishments

Authorised establishment on 31 December	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Greater Manchester	6,600	6,600	6,735	6,735	6,735	6,766	6,766	6,941	6,943	6,943	6,943
Merseyside	4,317	4,342	4,342	4,451	4,451	4,451	4,452	4,607	4,607	4,607	4,607
South Yorkshire	2,752	2,752	2,752	2,752	2,752	2,752	2,872	2,872	2,872	2,872	2,872
West Midlands	6,471	6,471	6,509	6,509	6,509	6,509	6,509	6,684	6,684	6,684	6,684
West Yorkshire	5,103	5,104	5,104	5,104	5,104	5,104	5,104	5,154	5,154	5,154	5,154
Northumbria	3,322	3,322	3,322	3,322	3,325	3,325	3,355	3,355	3,357	3,357	3,357

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many miners have been convicted during the current miners' dispute of *(a)* vandalism against National Coal Board property and *(b)* assaults against, and intimidation of, other National Coal Board personnel.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Magistrates' Courts (Fines)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of money owing at magistrates' courts covering the Greater London area for fines.

Mr. Mellor: The total amount of fines outstanding at magistrates' courts in the Greater London area at 30 September 1984 was £13,193,000. Part of this sum consists of fines in respect of which the time allowed for payment had not expired.

Libyan Students

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied with the arrangements for Libyan students in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: Yes.

Moslems (Imprisonment)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Moslems are currently in prison; in which prisons; and if they are provided with meals according to their religious customs.

Mr. Mellor: On 4 November 1984 there were 1,398 Moslems in prison service establishments, at the locations set out as follows. An alternative to the normal prison diet is provided for those Moslems who request it. A vegetarian diet is generally available; and establishments are encouraged to provide halal meat on an occasional basis. Appropriate steps are taken to ensure that Moslem beliefs concerning the preparation of meals are respected.

Moslems in prisons

	Number
Acklington	11
Albany	37
Aldington	1
Ashford	44
Ashwell	8
Askham Grange	1
Aylesbury	3
Bedford	2
Birmingham	53
Blantyre House	—
Blundeston	38
Bristol	34
Brixton	38
Brockhill	5
Buckley Hall	—
Bullwood Hall	1
Castington	—
Camp Hill	30
Campsfield House	—
Canterbury	7
Cardiff	21
Channings Wood	17
Chelmsford	—
Coldingley	22
Cookham Wood	4
Dartmoor	27
Deerbolt Camp	1
Dorchester	4
Dover	5
Drake Hall	1
Durham	8
East Sutton Park	1
Eastwood Park	2
Erlestoke	4
Everthorpe	4
Exeter	—
Featherstone	33
Feltham-Finnamore Wood	2
Ford	8
Foston Hall	—
Frankland	20
Gartree	16
Glen Parva	3
Gloucester	5
Grendon-Springhill	11
Guys Marsh	1
Haslar	—
Hatfield-Gringley Camp	2
Haverigg	3
Hewell Grange	1
Highpoint	24
Hindley	1
Hollesley Bay-Warren Hill	6
Holloway	13
Hull	12
Huntercombe	2
Kingston (Portsmouth)	6
Kirkham	14
Kirklevington	4
Lancaster	4
Latchmere House	2
Leeds	29
Leicester	6
Lewes	20
Leyhill	15
Lincoln	—
Liverpool	13
Long Lartin	35
Lowdham Grange	—
Low Newton	1
Maidstone	47
Manchester	25
Medomsley	—
New Hall	—
Northallerton	3
Northeye	33
North Sea Camp	—
Norwich	8
Nottingham	7
Onley	2
Oxford	18
Parkhurst	19
Pentonville	58
Portland	2
Preston	15
Pucklechurch	3
Ranby	1
Reading	3
Risley	13
Rochester	6
Rudgate	1
Send	—
Shepton Mallet	11
Shrewsbury	3
Stafford	8
Standford Hill	18
Stoke Heath	1
Styal	4
Sudbury	5
Swansea	3
Swinfen Hall	2
Thorp Arch	5
Usk	—
Verne	47
Wakefield	29

	Number
Wandsworth	91
Wellingborough	1
Werrington	—
Wetherby	4
Whatton	3
Winchester	20
Wormwood Scrubs	91
Wymott	2
Total	1,398

Civil Defence (North Wales Regional Headquarters)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the site for the Civil Defence North Wales regional headquarters has been determined; and whether work has started on its construction.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A site has been chosen but building work has not yet begun.

Soliciting

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for *(a)* the number of women imprisoned for soliciting, imprisoned after non-payment of a fine imposed for soliciting and prosecuted for soliciting in the last year before female soliciting ceased, under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1982, to be an imprisonable offence and *(b)* the number of women imprisoned for non-payment of a fine for soliciting, and the number of prosecutions for female soliciting in the year following that change.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. 369-70]: Information on the number of prosecutions for offences of prostitution and the sentences imposed is published annually under offence classifications 166 and 167 in table S1.1(A) of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables, Volume 1".

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Artificial Insemination

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how much money has been spent by the Government on research into techniques of interspecies fertilisation in each of the last 10 years; and what proportion of total Government spending on research into infertility this figure represents in each of those years;

(2) if he will list all those individuals or establishments which have received Government funds for research into interspecies fertilisation in each of the last 10 years; how much money each received; and for what precise purpose those funds were intended;

(3) if he will give the names of individuals and the establishments where they work who are currently involved in research into interspecies fertilisation between humans and other animals;

(4) what Government funds have been made available since 1954 for research into interspecies fertilisation between humans and other animals; to whom the funds were paid; and for what precise purpose.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the work supported by the Medical Research Council on "interspecies fertilisation" is solely related to the egg penetration test in which measurements are made of the ability of human sperm to penetrate hamster eggs. This is a test of male fertility; the test takes less than a day to perform and no embryos can develop. Project grant support was provided from 1980-83 to the department of obstetrics and gynaecology, King's College hospital medical school for a study in heterologous sperm penetration: a dynamic test of male fertility, to develop improved methods for the diagnosis of infertility in men. Expenditure was as follows:

	£'000s
1980-81	6
1981-82	9
1982-83	4
1983-84	Nil

The council also funds research at its reproductive biology unit, Edinburgh, which makes use of techniques of inter-species fertilisation, for the study and diagnosis of infertility in men. The costs are as follows:

	£'000s
1980-81	6
1981-82	7
1982-83	8
1983-84	9

The council estimates that its total expenditure on research relevant to infertility since 1980-81 has been as follows:

	£'000s
1980-81	1,301
1981-82	1,528
1982-83	1,586
1983-84	1,581

The percentage of the total represented by the work on inter-species fertilisation is therefore:

	Per cent.
1980-81	0·9
1981-82	1·0
1982-83	0·8
1983-84	0·6

No figures are available for MRC expenditure on research in this area prior to 1980-81. It is possible that research work relevant to interspecies fertilisation is also being conducted in universities and medical schools using funds allocated for teaching and research on the advice of the University Grants Committee, but no details of any such work are available.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how much money has been spent by the Government on research into techniques of artificial insemination for humans in each of the years since such funding commenced; and what proportion of total Government spending on research into infertility this figure represents in each of those years;

(2) if he will list all those individuals or establishments which are currently in receipt of Government funding for research into artificial insemination techniques for humans; how much money each received in the current year; and for what precise purpose the funds were intended.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which is the Government's main agency for the support of

biomedical research, is not supporting any research specifically into artificial insemination techniques for humans.

However, the council is supporting research at its reproductive biology unit in Edinburgh into ways of treating human sperm to improve its potency for use in artificial insemination. The cost of this aspect of the unit's research has been:

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Relevant unit expenditure £'000s	7	8	9	10
Per cent. of total MRC expenditure on research relevant to infertility	0·5	0·5	0·6	0·6

No figures are available for MRC expenditure on research in this area prior to 1980-81. It is possible that research work relevant to artificial insemination is also being conducted in universities and medical schools using funds allocated for teaching and research on the advice of the University Grants Committee, but no details of any such work are available.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how much money has been spent by the Government on research into techniques of in vitro fertilisation for humans in each of the years since such funding commenced; and what proportion of Government spending on research into infertility this figure represents for each of those years;

(2) if he will list all those individuals or establishments which are currently in receipt of Government funding for research into in vitro fertilisation techniques for humans; how much money each received in the current year; and for what precise purpose the funds were used.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which is the Government's main agency for the funding of biomedical research, supports work at its MRC reproductive biology unit in Edinburgh relevant to the development of clinical in vitro fertilisation (IVF). The unit is studying the chromosomes of ova fertilized in vitro to determine their normality, methods to promote the development of ova within the ovary and the requirements for successful implantation following IVF. The council also provides or has provided project grant support to the departments of obstetrics and gynaecology at Cambridge university and at King's College hospital medical school, London, for work on the fertility of spermatozoa. The costs relevant to the development of clinical in vitro fertilisation have been:

£000's

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Reproductive biology unit	55·5	66·3	68·6	79·0
Relevant work supported by project grants	5·6	10·7	11·6	4·9
Per cent. of total MRC expenditure on research relevant to infertility	4·6	5	5	5·3

No figures are available for MRC expenditure on research in this area prior to 1980-81. It is possible that research work relevant to in vitro fertilisation techniques is also being conducted at universities and medical schools using funds allocated for teaching and research on the advice of the University Grants Committee, but no details of any such work are available.

Human Embryos

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list all those individuals or establishments which are currently in receipt of Government funding for research into the effects of the freezing of human embryos; how much money each received in the current year; and for what precise purpose the funds were used;

(2) how much money has been spent by the Government on research into the effect of the freezing of human embryos in each of the years since such funding commenced.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which is the Government's main agency for the support of biomedical research, is not supporting any research specifically into the effects of freezing human embryos.

Education Act 1980

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has taken under section 20 of the Education Act 1980; and what was the cost involved.

Mr. Brooke: Under the powers conferred by section 20 of the Education Act 1980 my right hon. Friend supports scholarships through the national engineering scholarships scheme. The cost of this to the Department in the current financial year will amount to a little under £175,000. This figure will rise in subsequent years to £450,000 as the number of new scholarships awarded reaches an approved maximum of 300 per annum. The administrative costs to the Department of the scheme will amount to around £100,000 a year.

Soil Information System

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to facilitate the adoption by the European Commission of the soil survey of England and Wales's computer-based soil information system as the basis of the Commission's environmental information system.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that scientific advisers of the European Commission have shown interest in the possibility of adopting the computerised system, used by the soil survey of England and Wales to describe land and

water use and management, as the standard for a European system in these areas of work. Consideration of this possibility is still at a very early stage. The issues are in the first instance scientific and technical and it would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to seek to intervene directly with the Commission at this stage, before technical feasibility has been established.

Education and Business Partnership Schemes

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he collects about the number and scope of education and business partnership schemes initiated by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department does not collect detailed information on local schemes of industry/education co-operation but there are many schemes of great diversity, and increasing attention is being paid to links with industry and commerce, in schools and particularly in the further and higher education sectors. All local education authorities are encouraged to designate an official with special responsibility for school/industry links, and there are numerous examples of local firms providing practical help in support of work in the classroom.

Links with employers are emphasised in a number of DES-supported national programmes including the school curriculum industry project, the technical and vocational educational initiative, the micro electronics programme, the lower attaining pupils programme, the college-employer links project, PICKUP and the local collaborative projects. My right hon. Friend welcomes the active support given to such co-operation by the CBI, TUC, chambers of commerce and other organisations, and the attention given to such co-operation by the Audit Commission.

In higher education, science research parks, the teaching company scheme and other grant schemes run by the Science and Engineering Research Council with DES support, Women into Science and Engineering (WISE) and the marketing and liaison work of the industrial units maintained by higher education establishments are further examples of co-operative activity between education and industry.

The trend of increased partnership is welcome and necessary and the Government are doing all they can to encourage this.

School Closures

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what weight is given to parental preference in determining appeals against school closures.

Mr. Dunn: Where my right hon. Friend decides proposals to close schools published by local education authorities under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 he has to take into account all the relevant financial, educational and other factors, including parental preference and assess where the balance lies in each individual case. The weight given to individual factors such as parental preference necessarily varies from case to case according to the individual circumstances of what is proposed, the evidence from statutory objections, and the actual level of preferences expressed by parents in the allocation procedure.

Schools (Financial Discretion)

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy about the devolution of more financial discretion to individual schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is in favour of schools having significant responsibility for their own expenditure and has welcomed the identification by the Audit Commission, in its recent report on "Aspects of Non-Teaching Costs in Secondary Schools", of the potential merits of increased delegation. Proposals in the Green Paper "Parental Influence at School" (Cmnd 9242) would increase the financial responsibilities of school governing bodies and leave it open to local education authorities to delegate more. Responses to this and other proposals in the Green Paper are now being considered.

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many trainee teachers in each of the last five years failed to complete the probationary year; and how many failed to qualify at the end of it.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend receives from LEAs each year a relatively small number of recommendations that a probationary teacher should be declared unsuitable. The number of teachers over the last five years in respect of whom such a recommendation has been received and who have been determined by my right hon. Friend at the end of their probationary period as unsuitable for further employment as a qualified teacher is as follows:

1980—21
1981—30
1982—19
1983—17
1984—19

Information is not available on the number of those who leave employment as teachers, for whatever reason, before completing their probationary period. Probationary teachers normally serve a one-year period of probation, though LEAs have discretion to extend, reduce or waive the period of probation. In the majority of cases where an LEA recommends that a probationer be declared unsuitable, probation will have been extended before a final decision on unsuitablity is taken.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many of Her Majesty's Inspectorate since 1979 have been appointed as a result of open advertising and how many as a result of direct approaches to individual recruits.

Sir Keith Joseph: All Her Majesty's inspectors are recruited through open competitions overseen by the Civil Service Commission. They are subsequently formally appointed by Her Majesty in Council, and all are required to complete satisfactorily a period of probation. Two hundred and eight inspectors have been so appointed since 1 January 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if any individual members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate specialise in multicultural education; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Twenty-six members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate in England have specialist concerns in relation to multiracial education which occupy significant proportions of their time. Other inspectors are also involved in multiracial education matters from time to time.

Departmental Appointments

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the outside bodies to which his Department makes appointments, indicating the nature of each of these appointments, the names of current appointees and the dates at which each appointment falls due for renewal.

Mr. Brooke: This information is being collected and I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Teaching Standards

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to improve standards in teaching.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's plans are set out in the White Paper "Teaching Quality" (Cmnd. 8836). Action has already been taken to strengthen initial teacher training through the issue of rigorous criteria for the assessment of courses, and the establishment in August 1984 of a Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to review all existing courses against the criteria. The Government's plans also include improvements in the further training of serving teachers (with direct Government grants for national priorities) and measures to promote a better match between teachers' qualifications and the needs of schools. In a speech to the North of England education conference on 4 January 1985 my right hon. Friend surveyed progress since the publication of "Teaching Quality", and stressed the importance of establishing a national framework for a system to appraise the performance of teachers. Copies of this speech are available in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Local Authorities (Capital Allocations)

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the capital allocations on *(a)* the housing revenue account and *(b)* the non-housing revenue account for (i) Glasgow and (ii) Scotland in each year since 1979-80; and if he will express (i) as a percentage of (ii).

Mr. Ancram: The information is given in the following table:

Year	*Housing Revenue Account*			*Non-Housng Revenue Account*		
	Glasgow £m	*Scotland £m*	*Glasgow as a per cent of Scotland*	*Glasgow £m*	*Scotland £m*	*Glasgow as a per cent of Scotland*
1979-80	61,500	230,700	26·7	13,390	48,600	27·6
1980-81	62,581	231,738	27·0	14,230	59,350	24·0
1981-82	60,652	236,930	25·6	19,400	67,839	28·6
1982-83	57,659	279,637	20·6	28,662	106,590	26·9
1983-84	72,338	310,564	23·3	34,268	101,241	33·8
1984-85*	46,703	277,518	20·5	80,520	161,025	50·0
1985-86†	54,000	267,000	20·2	37,500	107,400	34·9

* gross allocations issued on 29 March 1984
† provisional gross allocations issued on 18 December 1984

Housing Statistics

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of houses started and the number of houses completed in the public sector in Scotland in each year since 1979; and if he will list them under the following headings *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Scottish Special Housing Association, *(c)* housing associations and *(d)* new towns;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of houses started and the number of houses completed in the private sector in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is published in table 11 of Scottish Housing Statistics 1983, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of houses started and completed in *(a)* the public sector and *(b)* the private sector in Glasgow in each year since 1979; and what percentage of the houses in the public sector were the responsibility of Glasgow district council.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Dwellings started or completed in Glasgow district

Year	*Private sector*		*Public sector*			
			Total number		*Proportion built by district (percentage)*	
	Starts	*Completions*	*Starts*	*Completions*	*Starts*	*Completions*
1979	866	817	1,835	913	42·3	67·4
1980	988	897	997	484	22·8	79·5

Year	Private sector		Public sector			
			Total number		Proportion built by district (percentage)	
	Starts	Completions	Starts	Completions	Starts	Completions
1981	971	1,061	156	2,000	—	27·9
1982	1,479	1,201	605	493	15·5	32·7
1983	1,456	1,299	311	312	37·9	20·2

Heritage and Galleries

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his meeting on heritage and galleries with Mr. Tim Clifford of the Scottish Galleries.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I hope to make an official visit to the National Galleries of Scotland in the near future.

Museums and Galleries (Attendances)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1984 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down to the individual institutions but comprising their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures of 1983.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is as follows.

	1984	Percentage change since 1983
National Galleries of Scotland (NGS)	358,605	+4·4
National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS)	293,901	+52·6
Royal Scottish Museum (RSM)	563,063	−2·8

Notes:
The NGS are the National Gallery of Scotland, the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (SNPG).
Since the SNPG share a building and entrance with the NMAS the attendances are included in the NMAS figure and not in that of NGS.

Rivers (Spray Irrigation)

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans to introduce legislation to control abstraction of water from rivers for spray irrigation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: Powers to control abstraction of water from rivers for spray irrigation purposes are already available in the Spray Irrigation (Scotland) Act 1964. I am aware, however, that these have not been found wholly adequate and I accept the need to introduce amending legislation when a place can be found in the parliamentary timetable. Meanwhile I am considering whether the present procedures can be simplified within the framework of the 1964 Act.

WALES

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1984 reported by the National Museum of Wales, comprising its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1983.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Seven hundred and sixty thousand three hundred and seventy five, an increase of 1·3 per cent. on the revised figure for 1983.

Ministerial Appointees

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his practice to collate information about the occupations of his appointees to all the statutory bodies and the principal committees answerable to and appointed by him at appointment stage and make this information available.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information about the occupations of people I appoint to the bodies listed in the Welsh Office entry in "Public Bodies 1984" is made available in many instances at the time of appointment. It is not the practice however for this information to be collated centrally within my Department.

PRIME MINISTER

Social Workers

Mr. Maclean asked the Prime Minister if she will institute a review of the probation and social services to determine inter alia *(a)* whether the minimum age for social workers is reasonable, *(b)* whether training standards are adequate, *(c)* whether a new disciplinary code is required and *(d)* what action is required to prevent criminals working in the service.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has announced his intention to review the arrangements for the disclosure of information about the criminal convictions of those seeking to work with children, and will be consulting the Association of Chief Police Officers and other interested bodies. I do not believe that a review of the other areas mentioned is necessary at the present time.

Sir Frank Cooper

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if it is with her approval that Sir Frank Cooper becomes chairman of United Scientific Holdings within a period of under two years of being a permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence.

The Prime Minister: The appointment of Sir Frank Cooper to the chairmanship of United Scientific Holdings does not take effect within two years of his retirement as permanent under-secretary at the Ministry of Defence, and therefore the Government's approval is not required.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Prime Minister whether she was consulted over the appointment of Sir Frank Cooper, former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, as chairman of United Scientific Holdings.

The Prime Minister: No. Under the rules governing the acceptance of appointments by former Crown servants,

no consultation was required, since Sir Frank Cooper will have been retired for over two years by the time he takes up appointment as chairman of United Scientific Holdings.

China

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent visit to China.

The Prime Minister: I had a successful visit to China from 18 to 20 December. My main purpose was to sign the joint declaration on the future of Hong Kong together with Premier Zhao Ziyang. I also held discussions on Hong Kong with the Chinese Prime Minister and other leaders. Both sides stressed their strong commitment to the agreement and to its full implementation.

I also held useful discussions with Chinese leaders on a number of bilateral and international issues. They welcomed the proposal for a high level trade delegation to visit China in March under the leadership of Lord Young. I informed Chinese leaders that Her Majesty The Queen was pleased to accept in principle the invitation to visit China. I also invited Premier Zhao Ziyang to visit Britain in 1985.

President Reagan

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with President Reagan.

The Prime Minister: I had a wide-ranging exchange of views with President Reagan, Vice-President Bush, Secretary of State Shultz, and senior members of the US Administration on 22 December at Camp David. The main subject of my discussion with the President was East-West relations and arms control talks. Among other subjects we discussed were the middle east, Central America and the US economy. We expressed our grave concern at the current famine in Africa and noted action which had already been taken by our Governments to alleviate the situation. I gave the President an account of my visit to China and my talks with Mr. Gorbachev and informed him of my recent meeting with Mr. FitzGerald.

This meeting was my first opportunity since President Reagan's re-election to discuss with him personally the prospects for arms control negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Our discussions, during which we naturally touched on the strategic defence initiative (SDI) research programme, were thorough and extensive.

Our assessments of the prospects were very similar, and, as I had earlier made clear to Mr. Gorbachev, we will not allow others to create divisions between ourselves and the United States on these important questions. During our discussion the President and I agreed on four specific points:

(1) the US, and Western, aim is not to achieve superiority, but to maintain balance, taking account of Soviet developments;

(2) SDI-related deployment would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter for negotiation;

(3) the overall aim is to enhance, not to undercut, deterrence;

(4) East-West negotiation should aim to achieve security with reduced levels of offensive systems on both sides. This will be the purpose of the resumed US-Soviet negotiations on arms control, which I warmly welcome.

Ex-Civil Servants (Appointments in Industry)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government concur with the recommendation of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee that there should be a five-year delay from the moment of retirement for former civil servants taking up appointments in private industry.

The Prime Minister: The Government are currently considering their response to the 27 recommendations made in the eighth report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on "Acceptance of Outside Appointments by Crown Servants". This will be published as soon as possible.

Infrastructure Expenditure

Mr. Rooker asked the Prime Minister why she used figures giving the cost per job through increasing infrastructure spending of between £35,000 and £55,000 in her answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *1202*; and if she will give the sources she used in quoting such figures.

The Prime Minister: The cost per job created through infrastructure expenditure can vary substantially according to the nature of the spending. The purpose in quoting the range of figures given in my reply to the right hon. Member for Birmingham Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was to indicate that spending on Government investment schemes could be a very expensive way of reducing unemployment.

The Treasury model simulations suggests that the cost to the PSBR per person taken off the unemployment register might, in the first year, be around £37,000 for local authority housing building; or around £47,000 for central Government investment. Furthermore, the estimated cost per job or per person taken off the unemployment register would rise over time as the increase in employment is eroded by higher interest rates and inflation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Radio Wavebands (Consultative Document)

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conclusions he has reached on the future of bands I and III in the light of the response he received to the consultative document, Cmnd. 9241; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: I hope to let the House know later this month what conclusions my right hon. Friend has reached.

West Midlands (Motor Industry)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the level of sales figures in the motor industries of the West Midlands region during the last five years; and what was the work force level for each year during the same period.

Mr. Butcher: Information in the form requested is not available. Total production of motor vehicles in the United Kingdom, and estimated total United Kingdom employment in the vehicle assembly industry, for the years in question were as follows:

	Total production '000 vehicles	Estimated total employment '000
1979	1,478·9	433·1
1980	1,312·9	411·8
1981	1,184·2	354·7
1982	1,156·5	318·0
1983	1,289·1	306·0

Industrial Assistance

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government financial assistance has been given to all industry in the north-east of England in the last 10 years to offset working losses.

Mr. Butcher: No financial assistance is given to industry for the purpose of offsetting working losses but, in considering the external financing limits of public sector industry forecast cash flow, taking account of any losses is an important factor.

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public capital has been invested over the last 10 years in the north-east of England, in the following industries *(a)* coal mining, *(b)* shipbuilding, *(c)* steel and *(d)* other.

Mr. Butcher: Financial assistance given in the north-east region since 1972, under the Industry Act 1972 and the Industrial Development Act 1984, has amounted to around £1,380 million.

Information on investment in the region by British Shipbuilders and the British Steel Corporation is not readily available, but I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Public investment in the coal industry is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Selective Financial Assistance

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of offers of selective financial assistance and the amount paid on Merseyside in each year since 1974.

Mr. Trippier: Information relating to sections 7 and 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 for Merseyside county is as follows:

Year	Number of offers	Value of offers '000's	Payments '000's
	Section 7		
1974	30	13,403	6,809
1975	43	4,379	8,142
1976	32	3,091	3,298
1977	72	7,459	2,182
1978	55	37,795	24,891
1979	90	19,518	11,757
1980	37	9,913	5,501
1981	15	2,408	5,763
1982	41	4,698	5,533
1983	44	7,964	4,755
*1984	50	5,123	3,153
	Section 8		
1974	—	—	—
1975	—	—	—
1976	8	1,167	63
1977	12	583	328
1978	33	2,609	670
1979	53	961	932
1980	53	351	784
1981	5	25	408
1982	23	1,064	291
1983	11	2,529	467
*1984	4	67	101

*January-September.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of offers of selective financial assistance and the amount paid in each year since 1974 in Kirkby and Prescott.

Mr. Trippier: Information relating to sections 7 and 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 for Kirkby and Prescott is as follows:

Section 7

	Kirkby			Prescott		
	No. of offers	Value of offers £'000	Payments £'000	No of offers	Value of offers £'000	Payments £'000
1974	6	4,174	146	2	115	30
1975	6	90	3,871	2	407	166
1976	2	27	210	5	1,159	689
1977	10	3,410	890	5	417	168
1978	8	1,399	578	7	614	449
1979	5	391	840	11	1,511	407
1980	3	3,753	472	2	260	527
1981	7	1,889	1,837	1	100	315
1982	1	49	1,640	3	95	575
1983	10	1,407	2,379	3	1,058	131
1984*	7	690	256	1	28	262

* January to September.

Section 8

	Kirkby			Prescott		
	No. of offers	Value of offers £'000	Payments £'000	No of offers	Value of offers £'000	Payments £'000
1974	—	—	—	—	—	—
1975	—	—	—	—	—	—
1976	—	—	—	1	334	—
1977	1	393	—	1	56	25
1978	—	—	—	2	99	193
1979	4	105	80	5	386	37
1980	1	1	15	2	8	92
1981	—	—	28	—	—	61
1982	1	6	16	—	—	—
1983	2	54	—	—	—	—
1984*	1	9	36	—	—	—

* January to September.

Glass and Glazing (Exhibition)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to the Glass and Glazing Federation to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. Arrangements have been made for such an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall to take place from Monday 4 February to Friday 8 February 1985.

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what was the number of offers of regional development grant and the amount paid in Kirkby and Prescott in each year since 1974;

(2) what was the number of offers of regional development grants and the amount paid on Merseyside in each year since 1974.

Mr. Trippier: Regional development grants have been paid in respect of approved expenditure incurred in providing eligible assets on qualifying premises in development areas, including special development areas. There have not been separate offers in advance as in the case of regional selective assistance.

Because of the way in which records are kept, it is not known how many applications for regional development grant there have been in respect of premises in the areas specified, or what payments of such grants were made in respect of such premises in 1974-6. The information available in respect of grant paid from 1977 onwards is given in the following table:

*Regional development grant paid**

£'000

	†Merseyside	‡Kirkby	‡Prescott
1977	19,709	329	559
1978	36,084	1,225	1,847
1979	34,528	866	2,581
1980	54,693	2,523	2,248
1981	85,812	3,646	1,220
1982	72,047	3,214	668
1983	58,459	4,152	1,149
1984 (to 30 September 1984)	50,166	2,429	406

* Total of payments over £25,000 only. Regional development grant payments of £25,000 or less cannot be attributed to any unit smaller than a planning region.

† Merseyside comprises the Merseyside metropolitan county and those parts of the former Merseyside special development area outside the Merseyside metropolitan county.

‡ Kirkby and Prescott are the former Kirkby employment office area and the former Prescott employment office area respectively.

Turkey

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the figures for imports and exports with Turkey for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Fletcher: The information is as follows:

Value £m

	United Kingdom Imports (cif)	*United Kingdom Exports (fob)*
1974	34·9	104·8
1975	34·6	143·6
1976	60·4	211·9
1977	57·7	210·2
1978	62·6	110·5
1979	65·8	135·6
1980	49·3	147·1
1981	128·2	159·6
1982	207·8	218·1
1983	184·9	243·8

Source: data corresponding to Table 1B of the United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics.

Note: all figures are on the current statistical basis.

Export Licences (Chatsworth Collection)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences have now been issued, without being referred to the Reviewing Committee for the Export of Works of Art, in respect of drawings which were sold at auction from the Chatsworth collection on 3 July.

Mr. Fletcher: Forty.

Radio Spectrum (Privatisation)

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has put out to tender a feasibility study of the privatisation of the radio spectrum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: No. But, following a recommendation in the Merriman report on the radio spectrum, Cmnd. 9000, it is the Government's intention, as stated in the British Telecom offer document — page 17 — to commission a feasibility study on the possibility of introducing in the future some form of pricing for the spectrum in place of or in addition to the present licence fee basis. I shall inform the House when the contract for the study has been made.

British Leyland

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Her Majesty's Government propose to extend any further financial assistance over and above regional aid to British Leyland.

Mr. Butcher: No.

Loan Guarantee and Business Expansion Schemes

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the failure rate for firms which have received assistance under the loan guarantee scheme and the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. 406]: Experience with the earliest loan guarantee scheme loans suggests that 40 per cent. of firms benefiting from the scheme could fail. However, it is hoped that there will be some improvement on later loans. No comparable figures are available for failures amongst companies receiving business expansion scheme investment.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been lost in allied industries owing to the dispute in the mining industry; and how many he estimates will be lost as a result of continuing action.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to my reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) on 18 December 1984 at column *112*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Statistics

Mrs. Currie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the amount of overseas aid

spent *(a)* in each country or *(b)* through each international organisation in 1983-84, the amount due to be spent in 1984-85 and the amount planned for 1985-86.

Mr. Raison: The information requested is not yet available. Figures for 1983-84 will be contained in the first edition of a new ODA statistical publication which will be available in February, and placed in the Library of the House. In future it will be published annually and show data on a financial year basis for the preceding years. So far British aid statistics have been published only on a calendar year basis. Information for 1984-85 will be in the Spring Supplementary Estimate for the Overseas Aid Vote Class II, 8 which will be available in February and bring up to date information already contained in the 1984-85 Main Estimates. Information for 1985-86 will be contained in the Main Estimate for that year, which is now under preparation and will be presented to Parliament in March.

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been given by the United Kingdom to the following countries since 1979; for what purpose; and in what form it has been given: Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, India, Jamaica, Mozambique, Nigeria and Cuba.

Mr. Raison: The figures for each of the years 1979 to 1983, the latest year for which figures are available, are as follows:

£000

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
ZIMBABWE					
Total aid	5,070	36,405	17,131	21,463	19,590
ODA project aid	—	—	1,555	4,108	2,626
Aid and trade provision	—	—	4,313	2,807	1,659
Programme aid	—	3,719	4,639	7,751	3,275
Other non-project aid	—	20,820	260	260	361
CDC project loans	—	1,500	—	—	5,000
Total financial aid	—	26,039	10,767	14,926	12,921
Personnel overseas	—	31	100	327	990
Students and trainees	5,056	10,295	6,028	5,330	3,841
Other TC	14	40	238	881	1,838
Total TC	5,070	10,366	6,364	6,538	6,669
TANZANIA					
Total aid	24,076	32,119	30,040	27,328	30,384
ODA project aid	8,462	17,641	15,575	15,283	21,694
Aid and trade provision	2,693	481	—	—	—
Programme aid	2,060	4,716	2,273	—	—
Other non-project aid	1,665	433	415	831	512
CDC project loans	2,145	94	2,436	3,780	1,470
Total financial aid	17,024	23,364	20,699	19,894	23,676
Personnel overseas	3,968	2,505	2,263	1,872	2,339
Students and trainees	1,345	2,470	2,317	2,226	1,483
Other TC	1,739	3,779	4,761	3,336	2,885
Total TC	7,051	8,754	9,341	7,434	6,707
ZAMBIA					
Total aid	29,159	20,696	24,119	14,237	14,485
ODA project aid	1,049	570	630	507	1,056
Aid and trade provision	826	920	14	—	—
Programme aid	16,175	4,815	4,107	415	97
Other non-project aid	1,382	1,025	1,901	2	24
CDC project loans	500	2,242	6,654	2,679	2,210
Total financial aid	19,932	9,572	13,306	3,602	3,387
Personnel overseas	8,224	9,604	9,433	8,720	8,488
Students and trainees	956	1,186	1,091	1,712	2,238
Other TC	47	334	288	203	372
Total TC	9,227	11,124	10,812	10,635	11,097
INDIA					
Total aid	153,314	86,080	168,550	54,204	127,600
ODA project aid	58,574	60,536	161,285	46,220	110,673
Aid and trade provision	—	—	—	—	6,336
Programme aid	88,949	17,551	—	—	—
Other non-project aid	759	372	57	327	245
Total financial aid	148,281	78,459	161,342	46,547	117,254
Personnel overseas	694	629	497	454	570
Students and trainees	1,824	3,131	2,797	3,896	5,216
Other TC	2,514	3,861	3,914	3,307	4,560

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Total TC	5,032	7,621	7,208	7,657	10,346
JAMAICA					
Total aid	6,369	4,767	8,681	8,868	8,922
Programme aid	5,690	2,816	7,444	4,800	3,734
Other non-project aid	10	51	—	283	—
CDC project loans	—	658	625	3,197	4,342
Total financial aid	5,700	3,525	8,069	8,280	8,076
Personnel overseas	290	280	232	272	472
Students and trainees	160	197	135	171	239
Other TC	219	765	245	145	135
Total TC	669	1,242	612	588	846
MOZAMBIQUE					
Total aid	6,369	4,629	5,379	1,924	1,805
ODA project aid	4,195	487	590	966	548
Aid and trade provision	—	—	782	248	286
Programme aid	1,665	1,485	1,949	224	25
Other non-project aid	94	1,981	1,096	137	695
Total financial aid	5,954	3,953	4,417	1,575	1,555
Personnel overseas	2	11	151	7	7
Students and trainees	—	—	2	51	105
Other TC	413	665	809	291	137
Total TC	415	676	962	349	250
NIGERIA					
Total aid	5,080	4,921	4,231	4,913	5,480
ODA project aid	—	158	350	—	—
Total financial aid	—	158	350	—	—
Personnel overseas	4,428	1,414	387	217	213
Students and trainees	437	1,148	1,690	2,924	3,618
Other TC	216	2,201	1,804	1,772	1,649
Total TC	5,080	4,763	3,881	4,913	5,480
CUBA					
Total aid	2	—	—	—	—
Students and trainees	1	—	—	—	—
Other TC	1	—	—	—	—
Total TC	2	—	—	—	—

TC=Technical Co-operation.

Food Aid (Report)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the report of the Court of Auditors of the European Community in relation to the delivery of food aid to the Third world.

Mr. Raison: The report concerns food aid committed in 1983 and is critical of some aspects of the management of the Community's food aid programme in that year. Measures have been taken since then, with our strong support, to ensure that more of the annual programme is delivered within the year and to reduce the average length of time between commitment and delivery. There is further scope for speeding up deliveries, particularly of emergency food aid (which the report does not cover), and we are pursuing this with our partners and the Commission.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Soil

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been undertaken into the effects of present agricultural and silvicultural systems on soil erosion and changes of soil fertility in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Fenner: Much research on soil erosion has been undertaken overseas, where it is a major and extensive problem. In the United Kingdom my Ministry, the Agricultural and Food Research Council, universities and polytechnics have undertaken surveys and investigations on soil erosion. The factors influencing erosion risk are well known; the most important are on soil stability, slope, cover crop and intensity of rainfall. The Agricultural and Development Advisory Service gives advice to farmers on measures to combat soil erosion where this problem exists.

A wide range of research has been and is currently undertaken to investigate the effect of agricultural practice on soil fertility in the United Kingdom.

Soil Survey

Mr. Raffan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is yet in a position to announce the future level of funding of the soil survey of England and Wales.

Mrs. Fenner: We hope to make an announcement shortly. Although my Ministry funds the soil survey, the survey is used by other organisations, businesses and individuals and its future funding therefore is not a matter for this Ministry alone.

Food Advisory Committee

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what matters he has referred to the Food Advisory Committee since its inception, and what are his reasons for so doing on *(a)* the composition, labelling and advertising of food and *(b)* additives, contaminants and other substances which are, or may be, present in food or used in its preparation with particular reference to the exercise of powers conferred on Ministers by sections 4, 5 and 7 of the Food and Drugs Act 1955.

Mr. Cohen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what matters he has referred to the Food Advisory Committee since its inception, and what are his reasons for so doing on *(a)* the composition, labelling and advertising of food and *(b)* additives, contaminants and other substances which are, or may be, present in food or used in its preparation with particular reference to the exercise of powers conferred on Ministers by sections 4, 5 and 7 of the Food and Drugs Act 1955.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Wales what matters he has referred to the Food Advisory Committee since its inception, and what are his reasons for so doing on *(a)* the composition, labelling and advertising of food and *(b)* additives, contaminants and other substances which are, or may be, present in food or used in its preparation with particular reference to the exercise of powers conferred on Ministers by sections 4, 5 and 7 of the Food and Drugs Act 1955.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what matters he has referred to the Food Advisory Committee since its inception, and what are his reasons for so doing on *(a)* the composition, labelling and advertising of food and *(b)* additives, contaminants and other substances which are, or may be, present in food or used in its preparation with particular reference to the exercise of powers conferred on Ministers by sections 4, 5 and 7 of the Food and Drugs Act 1955 and the corresponding provisions in enactments relating to Scotland.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what matters he has referred to the Food Advisory Committee since its inception, and what are his reasons for so doing on *(a)* the composition, labelling and advertising of food and *(b)* additives, contaminants and other substances which are, or may be, present in food or used in its preparation with particular reference to the exercise of powers conferred on Ministers by sections 4, 5 and 7 of the Food and Drugs Act 1955 and the corresponding provisions in enactments relating to Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Fenner: I am replying on behalf of all my colleagues to whom this question has been addressed, since my Ministry provides the secretariat.

During its first year of operation the Food Advisory Committee has concentrated on progressing the various tasks that it inherited from its two predecessors, the Food Standards Committee and the Food Additives and Contaminants Committee.

The more important items have included continuing work on a review of the use of colouring matter in food and a review of the regulations controlling skimmed milk with non-milk fat, on which its report was published on 19 September 1984.

Sugar Consumption

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North East, (Mrs. Short) *Official Report*, 10 December, columns 377-78, if he will place in the Library the scientific evidence upon which he is supporting the initiative of the Health Education Council to reduce sugar consumption.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

Epidemiological surveys, human clinical studies and animal experiments indicate that frequent or high intake of sugary foods predisposes to dental decay. For recent reviews of the evidence my hon. Friend may wish to consult "Sugar and Dental Caries: A Review of Human Studies" by Dr. E. Newbrun ("Science" Vol. 217, 30 July 1982) and "Diet and Dental Caries" by A. J. Rugg-Gunn ("The Prevention of Dental Disease" edited by Professor J. J. Murray, Chapter 2, OUP (1983)).

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Palace of Westminster (Speed Limits)

Dr. Marek asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will take steps to ensure that official cars travelling within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster do so at a moderate speed.

Mr. Biffen: I have brought the hon. Member's concern over this matter to the notice of the appropriate authorities of the Palace.

Government Legislation

Mr. Rooker asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the Bills introduced in the current Session by Her Majesty's Government which were not referred to in the Gracious Speech of 6 November.

Mr. Biffen: The following Bills which were not referred to in the Gracious Speech have been introduced this Session by Her Majesty's Government.

Brunei and Maldives Bill
Civil Aviation Bill
Friendly Societies Bill
Milk (Cessation of Production) Bill
Mineral Workings Bill
New Towns and Urban Development Corporations Bill
Shipbuilding Bill
Water (Fluoridation) Bill

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will undertake to collect and publish accurate statistics on an annual basis showing the number of people employed in the tourism industry in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Boyson: No. Like other countries, Northern Ireland does not maintain separate records of employment solely attributable to tourism.

Tigers

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the keeping of tigers on private property in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: No. The existing public health and animal welfare provisions to control the keeping of wild animals are adequate.

Murder Statistics

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders have been committed in *(a)* County Armagh, *(b)* County Tyrone, *(c)* County Fermanagh and *(d)* County Londonderry since 1970 to the latest available date.

Mr. Scott: Criminal records are not retained on a county basis and to obtain all the information requested would involve disproportionate cost. However, a special exercise has produced a breakdown of murders on a county basis for the current year (up to 16 December): 10 murders have been committed in County Armagh, 14 in County Tyrone, 6 in County Fermanagh and 2 in County Londonderry. The numbers of murders between 1970 and 1983 in the police divisions which include the principal parts of each of the counties in question were as follows:

RUC Division and No. of Murders

K (Co Armagh)—141
M (Co Tyrone)—71
L (Co Fermanagh)—75
N & O (Co Londonderry)—143

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the total number of terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Scott: The number of terrorist incidents* arising from the security situation in Northern Ireland is as follows:

Year	*Total*
1980	1,044
1981	1,720
1982	915
1983	834
1984 (up to 30 November)	555

* These incidents include shooting and bombing attacks against the security forces and civilians; the recovery of unexploded devices; and commercial bombings.

Plastic Bullets

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many formal police complaints have been received in the last two years in relation to incidents where plastic bullets have been involved; how many of these have been upheld; and what disciplinary action has been taken against the officers against whom complaints were made.

Mr. Scott: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 17 December at column *61*.

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims for damages have been made in the last two years for alleged injury by plastic bullets fired by *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland; what have been the results so far; in how many cases liability has been admitted; in how many cases the court has made the finding of liability; and what is the total sum of damages paid to date.

Mr. Scott: Since 1 January 1983, 32 claims have been made against the police authority for Northern Ireland in respect of injuries allegedly caused by plastic baton rounds fired by the police. To date only one has been brought to a conclusion. This was settled out of court, for an undisclosed sum, without an admission of liability.

Information in respect of similar claims against the Army and in respect of any applications under criminal injuries compensation legislation is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1984 reported by the Ulster Museum, comprising its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1983.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that about 255,000 people had visited the Ulster Museum and the Armagh County Museum by the end of 1984, a decrease of some 5 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1983.

Teachers (Salaries)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the criteria used for the award of additional score points to secondary schools in conection with the salaries being offered to teachers;

(2) pursuant to his reply of 20 December, how many score points have been awarded to each of the secondary schools listed in that reply.

Mr. Scott: The main criterion used by education and library boards to designate schools of exceptional difficulty for the award of additional scale score points was the proportion of pupils who qualified for free school meals; other factors such as truancy, staff turnover and the proportion of pupils with linguistic difficulties were also taken into account. The additional scale score points awarded to each school are as follows:

	Points
Belfast Board	
Kelvin Secondary	1
Mount Collyer	1
Graymount	1
Ashfield Girls'	1
Ashfield Boys'	1
Model Girls'	1
Model Boys'	1
Orangefield Boys'	1
Dunlambert Boys'	1
Larkfield Secondary	1
Orangefield Girls'	1
Somerdale Boys'	1
Everton Girls'	1
Deramore	1
St. Patrick's Secondary	2
St. Gabriel's Secondary	2
St. Thomas' Secondary	2
St. Louise's Comprehensive	2
St. Monica's High	1
Little Flower Girls' Secondary	1
Our Lady of Mercy	1
St. Rose's Secondary	2
Christian Brothers (Glen Road)	1
St. Peter's Secondary	2
St. Augustine's High	1
St. Genevieve's High	1
Cross and Passion High	2
St. Gemma's Secondary	2
St. Paul's Secondary	1
Christian Brothers' (Gort Na Mona)	1
La Salle Boys'	1
Western Board	
Castlederg Secondary	1
Faughan Valley High	1
Omagh Secondary	1
Limavady High	1
St. Colman's High, Strabane	2
St. Mary's High, Limavady	2
St. Patrick's, Omagh	1
St. Mary's, Creggan	3
Our Lady of Mercy, Strabane	1
St. Fancheas', Enniskillen	1
St. Joseph's Boys, Enniskillen	1
St. Mary's, Irvinestown	1
St. Patrick's and St. Brigid's, Claudy	1
St. Brigid's Girls, Omagh	1
St. Joseph's, Creggan	3
Dean Brian Maguire	1
St. Patrick's High, Dungiven	1
St. John's, Dromore	1
St. Brecan's, Londonderry	2
St. Peter's High, Londonderry	3
St. Cecilias, Londorderry	3
North-Eastern Board	
Garvagh	1
Magherafelt	1
Coleraine Girls'	2
Coleraine Boys'	2
Maghera	1
Carrickfergus	2
Ballymena Boys'	1
Ballymena Girls'	1
Hopefield	2
Ballycastle High	2
Ballymoney	2
Cullybackey	1
Rathcoole	2
Dunclug	1
St. Aloysius', Cushendall	1
St. Comgall's, Larne	1
St. Olcan's, Randalstown	2
Our Lady of Lourdes, Ballymoney	2
St. Patrick's, Ballymena	2
St. Joseph's, Coleraine	1
St. Columb's, Draperstown	2
St. Mary's, Portglenone	2
St. Paul's, Kilrea	1
St. Pius X, Magherafelt	2
St. Patrick's, High Maghera	3
Stella Maris, Rathcoole	2
South-Eastern Board	
St. Mary's, Girls, Downpatrick	3
St. Colmcille's, Downpatrick	3
St. Colman's, Ballynahinch	3
St. Malachy's, Castlewellan	4
De La Salle, Downpatrick	4
St. Columba's, Portaferry	3
Southern Board	
Clounagh Junior,High	1
Killicomaine Junior High	1
Fivemiletown High	1
Armagh Secondary	1
Aughnacloy Secondary	1
Brownlow High	2
Newry High	1
St. Joseph's Boys', Newry	1
St. Columban's High, Kilkeel	1
St. Paul's, Bessbrook	2
St. Brigid's Boys', Armagh	1
St. Joseph's High, Crossmaglen	2
St. Patrick's High, Cookstown	1
St. Brigid's High, Portadown	1
St. Mary's Junior High, Lurgan	1
St. Patrick's High, Banbridge	1
St. Paul's Junior High, Lurgan	1
St. Mary's Girls', Newry	2
St. Patrick's Girls', Dungannon	1
St. Mark's, Warrenpoint	2
Our Lady's High, Cookstown	1
St. Malachy's High, Portadown	1
St. Caran's, Ballygawley	2
St. Patrick's High, Keady	2
St. Joseph's High, Coalisland	2
Lismore Comprehensive	1
St. Patrick's Boys', Dungannon	1
St. Catherine's College, Armagh	2

Trials

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a statement on the delays in bringing cases to trial in Northern Ireland;

(2) if he will make a statement on the time served in custody on remand by people charged with offences under emergency legislation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 December 1984, c. *217*]: The Government continue to be concerned at the length of time taken to bring cases to trial and to complete the judicial process in Northern Ireland, especially in a small number of complex cases. A number of measures are being pursued, including the appointment already announced of an additional county court judge; but there is no one measure which is likely efficiently to reduce delays while allowing for the appropriate procedures and rights to be observed. I remain in touch with the Attorney-General and the Lord Chancellor in the hope of achieving improvement.

DEFENCE

RAF Honington (Noise)

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in implementing his

Department's policy to pay injurious affection, compensation and noise insulation grants as a result of increased noise at RAF Honington; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Nine claims for injurious affection compensation have now been settled. These have all been from eligible persons residing within the boundary of the noise insulation grant scheme. I am pleased to have this opportunity to confirm that claims for compensation may also be paid to owner occupiers of dwellings and certain other properties outside the scheme boundary in line with part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973, the provisions of which my Department has agreed to follow administratively and which do not limit payment to the boundary of any noise insulation grant scheme. Claimants will need to show that their property has suffered depreciation in value as a direct result of the increase in noise from the deployment of Tornado aircraft to RAF Honington in 1981. In view of previous uncertainty over those who may be eligible to submit claims for compensation, the last date for receipt of claims has been extended to 31 December 1985.

Progress with noise insulation grants has been delayed because of requests by applicants to waive the requirement to fit permanent ventilation. These need careful consideration because safety aspects are involved, but I hope to announce the result shortly.

Drugs (Prescriptions)

Mr. Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Defence if doctors practising in the armed services are required to prescribe generic rather than branded drugs; and what estimate he can make of the percentage of the total drugs prescribed that are generic.

Mr. Lee: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 12 November 1984 at column *156*, when I stated that it has long been Ministry of Defence policy to insist on generic dispensing of drugs whenever a generic equivalent of the item prescribed exists. There are of course many branded drugs which have no generic equivalent. It has not been possible to estimate the proportions of service prescriptions for branded and generic drugs.

Type 22 Frigates

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now announce his decision upon the placing of the two orders for type 22 frigates.

Mr. Lee: No decision on the placing of these orders has yet been taken.

RAF (Basic Trainer)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the award of a contract for the new basic trainer for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Butler: As I stated in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on 18 December at column *135*, British Aerospace and Shorts have now been invited to submit the best and final offers. Hunting Firecracker Aircraft and AAC-Westlands have subsequently indicated that they wish to submit revised bids and I have agreed that their proposals will be considered. It is expected that, after evaluation of the new offers, a final decision will be made in the spring.

NATO (Troop Deployments)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence which member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation do not make their troop deployment subject to control by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Stanley: Apart from those few forces directly under NATO command, all peacetime troop deployments by member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation are made under national control.

Mr. Peter Levene

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, on his appointment as chief of defence procurement, Mr. Peter Levene has been asked to divest himself of all his shareholdings in United Scientific Holdings and all its subsidiary and related companies.

Mr. Butler: Yes.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what conditions have been placed on Mr. Peter Levene's commercial activities in the arms world following completion of his five years as chief of defence procurement.

Mr. Butler: Mr. Levene has agreed to abide by the normal rules that govern the acceptance of business or other outside appointments, which apply to Crown servants.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the report on defence procurement prepared by Mr. Peter Levene when he was temporary adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Butler: No.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in his report on defence procurement, Mr. Peter Levene recommended the appointment of a new chief of defence procurement.

Mr. Butler: No.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr. Peter Levene in his new position as chief of defence procurement will have any responsibility for contracts for refitting naval vessels and any supervisory role in the work of the royal dockyards.

Mr. Butler: Responsibility for refitting naval vessels, including contract refitting, rests with the chief of fleet support. As regards contract refitting, while the chief of defence procurement is administratively responsible for the contracts staff and for certain project overseeing staff who assist the chief of fleet support in this area, it is the chief of fleet support who is the responsible accounting officer. The chief of fleet support is responsible, both in terms of departmental organisation and as the accounting officer, for the work of the royal dockyards.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis the salary figure of £95,000 for Mr. Peter Levene the new chief of defence procurement was agreed.

Mr. Butler: Mr. Levene's salary was negotiated at a level acceptable to both the Government and Mr. Levene. This is substantially lower than the salary he receives at present.

Mr. David Perry

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present salary of Mr. David Perry, chief of defence procurement.

Mr. Butler: £45,500.

RAF (Fuel Allowance)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans further cuts in the Royal Air Force's fuel allowance.

Mr. Lee: No further cuts are planned for 1984-85.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what effects a 10 per cent. cut in the Royal Air Force fuel allowance will have on pilot flying training.

Mr. Lee: Some adjustments to the pattern of flying training of new pilots will be necessary but the number of pilots joining the front line from operational conversion units will not be affected.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what effects a 10 per cent. cut in the Royal Air Force fuel allowance will have on Support Command.

Mr. Lee: Some adjustments to the pattern of flying training of new pilots will be necessary.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much money he envisages saving by cutting the Royal Air Force's fuel allowance by 10 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The overspend to be corrected by this measure is over £20,000,000.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that a 10 per cent. cut in the Royal Air Force fuel allowance will not impair the operational effectiveness of the United Kingdom-based air defence forces.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that a 10 per cent. cut in the Royal Air Force's fuel allowance will not impair the operational effectiveness of 18 Group.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that a 10 per cent. cut in the Royal Air Force's fuel allowance will not impair the operational effectiveness of the air force in the central front.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the Royal Air Force's fuel allowance has been cut.

Mr. Lee: The fuel allowance has been reduced in order to ensure that expenditure upon the Royal Air Force remains within the agreed level of funding for 1984-85.

RAF (Strike Capability)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that the current strength of the RAF's United Kingdom-based maritime strike force is adequate for the United Kingdom's present defence needs; and whether he is satisfied that the Royal Air Force will have an adequate maritime strike capability for the next 10 years.

Mr. Stanley: I am satisfied that the RAF's United Kingdom-based maritime strike force represents a significant contribution to NATO's overall requirements for such aircraft and that the Buccaneer equipped with the Sea Eagle anti-ship missile will provide an effective maritime strike capability for the RAF into the mid-1990s.

Nimrod Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department plans to issue tender documents for maintenance work on the 32 Nimrod Mark 2 aircraft.

Mr. Butler: I hope to make an announcement about Nimrod major servicing policy shortly.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is currently considering the need for a Nimrod replacement for the mid-1990s or beyond.

Mr. Butler: Yes, but our considerations are still at an early stage.

Buccaneer Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department have shelved plans to bring into service an additional 10 Buccaneer strike aircraft.

Mr. Butler: It is planned to maintain two squadrons of Buccaneers in the maritime strike/attack role. It is long standing policy not to disclose the aircraft strengths of front line units.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans for a Buccaneer replacement for the mid-1990s or beyond.

Mr. Butler: There are no plans for a new aircraft design to replace the Buccaneer.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how long the Buccaneer aircraft will remain in service in the maritime attack role.

Mr. Stanley: They are planned to remain in service into the mid 1990s.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the capability of Tornado GR1 in the maritime attack role.

Mr. Stanley: The Federal Republic of Germany has deployed the Tornado in the maritime attack role, but given the availability of Buccaneers we have no present plans to use RAF Tornado GR1s in this role.

Ocean-going Tug (Sinking)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the sinking of an ocean-going tug off the Isle of Wight on 24 December 1984 on its way to the Falklands.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 14 December 1984, *Official Report*, column 616, whether the portion of the record of HMS Conqueror's position obtained by taking readings from the submarine's inertial navigation system covering 30 April to 4 May 1982 has been retained for analysis.

Mr. Stanley: The portion of HMS Conqueror's record currently known to have been retained for analysis covers the period from the morning of 2 May 1982 to the morning of 3 May 1982.

TRANSPORT

Welsh Rail Services

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many £5 million-plus schemes for improvement to any section of the Welsh rail network have been approved by the British Railways Board in each year since 1979; and how many such schemes have been approved each year since 1979 for *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland.

Mr. Ridley: Much investment benefits the railway system generally, or extensive parts of it, rather than particular areas. And most projects are less than £5 million in size. Of the 44 projects over £5 million approved by the BRB since 1979, 18 were not associated with a particular part of the United Kingdom. Only one project—Chester area resignalling—had specific benefits that extended into a part of Wales. The figures requested for England and Scotland are as follows:

	England	*Scotland*
1979	3	—
1980	*2	—
1981	1	—
1982	2	—
1983	6	3
1984	8	1

* Includes Chester area resignalling scheme.

Airports

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the numbers of passengers whose journeys originate or have their destinations at Britain's regional airports choosing to interconnect through European gateways in preference to London.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Such information can be obtained from origin and destination surveys conducted by the Civil Aviation authority, as follows:

1983—routes from Manchester, Birmingham, East Midlands and Liverpool.
1982 — routes from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Prestwick and Aberdeen.
1975-76—routes from other major regional airports.

The information cannot be simply summarised, but details can be provided by the CAA for specific routes or route groupings. For instance, in 1983, about a quarter of passengers from Manchester airport interlining on scheduled routes chose to connect at European airports and about three quarters at London airports.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether, as a result of his statement on 20 December, he expects any changes in the arrangements or timing of the sale of the Civil Aviation Authority airports in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No, it is not essential that clause 5 of the Civil Aviation Bill is enacted before any of the aerodromes are sold.

International Passenger Survey

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will be using data collected by the Government's international passenger survey in 1984 to reassess the proportions of passengers with actual origins or destinations outside the South East of England.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Data on the origins and destinations of passengers are kept under review. The results of the international passenger survey for 1984 will be available by mid-1985 and will provide useful information, indicating areas of longest stay for foreign passengers, and for United Kingdom passengers their home by planning region. Civil Aviation Authority surveys provide information on the origin and destination of terminating passengers at the major United Kingdom airports. A survey was carried out in 1983 at Manchester, Birmingham, East Midlands and Liverpool airports, and in 1984 at the British Airports Authority's London airports and Luton.

Road Humps Regulations

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the proposals submitted to him by the hon. Member for Uxbridge for the amendment of the Road Humps Regulations to permit illuminated signs at each end of a private street or road as an alternative to the illumination of individual humps.

Mrs. Chalker: I have written to my hon. Friend.

London Underground

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport, in each of the last 10 years, how many fires have occurred on London Transport Underground which had some effect on passenger service; and what information he has as to the cause of each fire.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to his reply*, 18 December 1984, c. *132*]: The number of fires on London Regional Transport's railways in each of the last 10 years which had some effect on passenger services is shown in the table:

Fires on London Regional Transport's Railways which affected passenger services

Year	Fires on trains	Fires in stations, signal boxes, and on and alongside the track
1975	Nil	1
1976	Nil	5
1977	Nil	5
1978	Nil	3
1979	Nil	5
1980	Nil	8
1981	2	7
1982	1	3
1983	1	7
1984*	1	2

* Provisional figures.

As well as the recent fire at Oxford Circus, the figures include three serious incidents each of which was the subject of a formal inquiry and a published report. These were at Finsbury Park in 1976; at Goodge Street in 1981; and between Wood Green and Bounds Green in 1982. All the other incidents were minor. Individual causes are too various to list, but they include arson, ignition of dust by sparks from the conductor rails, and carelessly discarded cigarettes.

EMPLOYMENT

Youthaid

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the answer of the Minister of State on 20 November, *Official Report*, column *138*, if he will list the documents he has received from the organisation Youthaid in the past six months; and if he will also list those in which there are inaccuracies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The answer referred to was given in response to a question about the destinations of young people leaving the youth training scheme. Youthaid had written to me on this subject on 5 November and to my right hon. Friend on 19 November. In both these letters, Youthaid wrongly claimed that participation in the scheme did not offer young people a good chance of a job at the end, a point it chose to publicise as part of its apparent campaign to denigrate the achievements of the scheme.

In fact, the information available so far is very encouraging. The latest sample survey carried out by the Manpower Services Commission showed that almost 60 per cent. of young people leaving the scheme went into work and that an additional 13 per cent. either went into, or intended to go into, further education or training.

Manpower Services Commission (Special Programmes)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the name and eligibility conditions of all special programmes managed by the Manpower Services Commission to date, including now abandoned programmes; what has been the total number of entrants on to each programme; what percentage of entrants on to each programme have been aged *(a)* under 25 years, *(b)* over 25 years, *(c)* between 25 and 44 years and *(d)* over 45 years; and what percentage of entrants in sub-groups *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)* were out of work for more than 52 weeks at the time of entry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployed Persons

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of unemployed persons have been out of work for a year or more and are aged *(a)* under 25 years, *(b)* over 25 years, *(c)* 25 to 44 years and *(d)* over 45 years; of the latter sub-groups, what percentage are (i) male and (ii) female; of the latter sub-groups, what percentage are *(x)* married, *(y)* single, widowed, separated or divorced; of the latter sub-groupings, what percentage (1) have dependent children of 0 to 15 years and (2) do not have dependent children of 0 to 15 years; of all sub-groupings, what percentages are *(aa)* unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers and *(bb)* are not unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers; and of all sub-groups, what percentage have *(A)* an employed spouse, *(B)* an unemployed spouse and *(C)* an economically inactive spouse.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to extend the youth training scheme to two years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We have no immediate plans to extend the youth training scheme in this way, and eligibility rules for the scheme in 1985-86 (which are largely unchanged from this year) were announced on 12 November 1984. However, various proposals for the enhancement of provision for 14-18 year olds are currently being considered.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people have refused to take up the offer of a place on youth training schemes since the scheme was launched.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The total number of refusals is not available. The number of people reported to the unemployment benefit service, in the period 1 September 1983 to 30 September 1984, the latest date for which figures are available, for refusing a youth training scheme place was 2,308.

Skillcentres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will undertake a thorough survey of users and potential users of skillcentre graduates in each area in which a closure has been proposed by the Skillcentre Training Agency, including in the survey a question as to the respondents' views on the proposed closure; and if he will publish the results in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The success of skillcentres in meeting the needs of employers is already monitored

through regular surveys of people completing courses under the training opportunities scheme. We see no need to burden employers with yet more official paperwork.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to instruct the Manpower Services Commission to consult local authorities and Members of Parliament before finally approving the closure of skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission is itself representative of local authority interests, as well as employer, employee and professional education interests. Members of Parliament have the opportunity to make representations in the usual ways about the skillcentre training agency proposals, including through the Select Committee on Employment which is currently considering them.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the local education authorities which have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been accepted to participate in the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is set out as follows by the academic year in which the proposed project is or was due to start. No decisions have been taken about applications for 1985-86.

For projects to start at the beginning of the academic year:

1983-84

Applied

Local Education Authority

Barnet
Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Bexley
Birmingham
Bradford
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Clywd
Cornwall
Coventry
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Doncaster
Dorset
Dudley
Dyfed
Ealing
East Sussex
Enfield
Gateshead
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Haringey
Harrow
Hereford and Worcester
Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire
Hillingdon
Isle of Wight
Kent
Kingston upon Thames
Leeds
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Merton
Mid-Glamorgan
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
North Yorkshire
Oxfordshire
Redbridge
Rochdale
Sandwell
Solihull
Somerset
South Tyneside
Staffordshire
Stockport
Suffolk
Surrey
Tameside
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Warwickshire
West Glamorgan
West Sussex
Wigan
Wiltshire
Wirral

Accepted

Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Birmingham
Bradford
Clywd
Devon
Enfield
Hereford and Worcester
Leicestershire
Sandwell
Staffordshire
Wigan
Wirral

1984-85

Applied

Local Education Authority

Barnet
Berkshire
Bexley
Bolton
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwali
Coventry
Croydon
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Doncaster
Dorset
Durham
Dudley
Dyfed
Ealing
West Sussex
Essex
Gateshead
Gloucestershire
Gwent
Gwynedd
Hampshire
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Isle of Wight
Kent
Kingston upon Thames
Kirklees
Leeds
Lincolnshire
Merton
Mid-Glamorgan
Newcastle upon Tyne
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
North Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Oxfordshire
Powys
Redbridge
Richmond
Rochdale
Salford
Sheffield *(withdrew)*
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Tyneside
Stockport
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Tameside
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Warwickshire
West Glamorgan
West Sussex
Wiltshire
Wolverhampton

*Education Authority**

Borders
Central
Dumfries and Galloway
Fife
Lothian
Strathclyde
Tayside
Western Isles

* Scotland joined the Technical and Vocational Initiative in 1984.

Accepted

Berkshire
Bolton
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall
Coventry
Croydon
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Doncaster
Dorset *(withdrew)*
East Sussex
Durham
Dudley
Essex
Gloucestershire
Gwent
Gwynedd
Hampshire
Havering
Isle of Wight
Kirklees *(withdrew)*
Leeds *(withdrew)*
Lincolnshire
Mid-Glamorgan
Newcastle upon Tyne
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
North Tyneside
Northumberland
Powys
Richmond
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Tyneside
Stockport
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Tameside
Warwickshire
West Glamorgan

Education Authority	Fife
Borders	Strathclyde
Dumfries and Galloway	

1985-86
Applications Only

Local Education Authority	
Bexley	
Bromley	West Sussex
Dyfed	Wiltshire
Ealing	Wolverhampton
Hillingdon	
Kent	*Education Authority*
Kingston upon Thames	Lothian
North Yorkshire	Strathclyde
Nottinghamshire	Tayside
Redbridge	Western Isles
South Glamorgan	
Walsall	

Unemployed Young Persons

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number and percentage of young people aged 16 and 17 years who are *(a)* unemployed and (i) claiming benefit and (ii) not claiming benefit; *(b)* on a youth training scheme, *(c)* in school, *(d)* at further education establishments, *(e)* in work and *(f)* elsewhere at the latest available date and for each of the past five years, with appropriate adjustments for the available categories in previous years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available estimates are shown in the following table:

Estimates of Education/Labour Market Status of Young People
Great Britain (January each year)

	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984	
	No (000)	*Per cent.*	*No (000)*	*Per cent.*	*No (000)*	*Per cent.*	*No (000)*	*Per cent.*	*No (000)*	*Per cent.*
*Aged 16**										
Total population†	900	100	920	100	930	100	910	100	900	100
Full-time education	380	42	400	44	440	48	440	49	410	45
— Schools	260	28	270	30	290	32	290	32	280	31
— Further education‡	120	13	130	14	150	16	150	17	130	14
YTS/YOP	50	6	100	10	130	14	170	19	220	25
Claimant/registered unemployed‖	50	6	110	12	110	12	130	14	110	13
Other¶ (mainly employed outside YTS)	420	47	310	34	250	26	170	19	160	18
*Aged 17**										
Total population†	880	100	900	100	930	100	930	100	910	100
Full-time education	220	25	260	28	260	28	290	32	280	31
— Schools	140	16	160	18	160	17	180	19	170	19
— Further education‡	80	9	100	11	100	11	120	12	110	12
YTS/YOP	20	2	40	4	50	5	70	7	50	6
Claimant/registered unemployed‖	80	9	120	14	160	17	160	17	160	17
Other¶ (mainly employed outside YTS)	560	64	490	54	460	50	410	44	420	46

Notes:
* Ages as at 31 August of preceding year.
† Estimates for 1980 and 1981 are based on pre-1981 Census information.
‡ Excluding YTS/YOP.
‖ Claimant unemployed for 1983 and 1984; registered unemployed prior to 1983.
¶ Mainly those in employment outside YTS. Also includes some who are seeking work but not claiming benefit (for 1983 and 1984) or not registered for employment (prior to 1983), some who are neither employed nor seeking work (eg because of domestic responsibilities) and net errors in the other estimates.
Estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number and percentage of unemployment among 16 and 17-year-olds *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by ethnic origin, *(c)* by region and *(d)* by sex at the last available date and for September, January and June in each of the past five years.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on unemployed persons under 18, nationally and regionally by sex for January, April, July and October for each of the past five years, is available in the House of Commons Library. The unemployment rates for under 18-year-olds by sex since January 1980 appear in table 2.15 of the December 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*; however, unemployment rates by age are not available by region.

Following the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982, details of the ethnic origin of unemployed are no longer available from the count. Figures by country of birth or parents' birth for unemployed registrants aged under 18 for February each year up to 1982 are available in the House of Commons Library, but not in the form of percentage rates. Some information on numbers and percentages unemployed by ethnic origin is available from the 1979, 1981 and 1983 labour force surveys but not in sufficient detail to provide figures for under 18 year age groups.

Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are presently participating on schemes run by the Manpower Services Commission which are broadly similar to those run by community industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Young people with personal and social disadvantages participate in both the youth training scheme and the community programme. But statistics are not kept which would enable a valid comparison to be made with those employed on the community industry scheme.

Apprenticeships (Federal Republic of Germany)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Employment what studies he has made of training apprenticeships involving specific skills organised for school leavers in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Training provision in the Federal Republic of Germany was considered in the Institute of Manpower Studies' recent report "Competence and Competition", sponsored by the Manpower Services Commission and the National Economic Development Office. In addition, I had the opportunity of seeing for myself the Federal Republic's arrangements for the transition from school to work during a visit there in 1983.

South African Sports Office (Director)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Employment if Her Majesty's Government have granted a work permit to Mr. E. Barlow, the director of the South African sports office, in London.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department has not granted a work permit for Mr. Barlow in this capacity.

Employment Service

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has approved the proposals for the development of the employment service recently agreed by the Manpower Services Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. King: I have today replied to the chairman of the Commission endorsing the proposals which were agreed at the commission's meeting on 13 December.

The Government welcome the detailed proposals which have now been agreed following widespread consultation and which are in line with the paper put to the commission in November, a copy of which is in the Library. They are designed to meet the aim, which the Government and the Commission share, of maintaining an effective, efficient and economical public *Employment Service* which meets the needs of employers and jobseekers in today's labour market. The commission will now be pressing ahead with plans for implementing the proposals.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Travellers' Allowances (EC)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any representations from Northern Ireland in support of uniform travellers' allowances for day trips across national borders within the European Economic Community.

Mr. Rifkind: No.

Mr. Richard Burke (EC Commission)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if the Government representative at the recent EEC Council of Ministers meeting supported the appointment of Mr. Richard Burke as a Vice-President of the European Economic Community Commission;

(2) *(a)* how many working days Mr. Richard Burke can serve as a Vice-President of the EEC Commission, *(b)* what is his increase in annual salary and *(c)* what effect this appointment has on his pension rights.

Mr. Rifkind: The EC merger treaty (1967) provides that, in the event of retirement or death, vice-presidents of the Commission shall be replaced for the remainder of their term of office by common accord of the Governments of the member states. In accordance with these provisions, the Presidency of the Council nominated Mr. Burke, and his appointment went through unopposed.

The effect of Mr. Burke's appointment on his remuneration and pension rights can only be calculated applying complex rules to his individual case. When the necessary information has been obtained, I shall write to the right hon. Member.

Turkey

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last paid an official visit to Turkey; and when he next proposes to visit Turkey.

Mr. Rifkind: As announced on 14 December my right hon. and learned Friend intends to pay an official visit to Turkey from 11-13 February. This will be his first such visit.

Cyprus

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom, being a guarantor power for Cyprus, has been notified formally of the recent gesture by the Turkish Cypriot community to encourage a settlement in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: We have been in close touch with the United Nations Secretary-General throughout the series of proximity talks on Cyprus which culminated in his most welcome announcement of a high level meeting between the leaders of both communities to take place on the 17 January.

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: During his visit to Hong Kong from 20-21 December, my right hon. and learned Friend accompanied the Prime Minister on several of her engagements. This gave him an opportunity to meet unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils as well as community and business representatives. In addition he attended a meeting of the Executive Council in Hong Kong and was briefed on developments around Victoria harbour.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the number of *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* young persons and *(d)* juveniles in prison in Hong Kong at the latest available date;

(2) what is the longest period of time served in custody on remand by a person currently remanded in prison in Hong Kong;

(3) what is the number of *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* young persons and *(d)* juveniles on remand in custody in Hong Kong at the latest available date;

(4) what is the number of mentally disordered persons in prison in Hong Kong *(a)* on remand and *(b)* sentenced;

(5) if he is satisfied with conditions in penal establishments in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his answer*, 20 December 1984, c. *295*]: The following is the information.

As at 17 December 1984 there were 4,892 men, 134 women and 357 young persons aged 14-20 (348 male and nine female) in prison in Hong Kong. Offenders below the age of 14 are not sentenced to penal institutions.

As at 17 December 1984 the longest period of time served in custody by a person currently on remand in Hong Kong was 327 days.

As at the same date, there were 428 men, 12 women and 62 young persons aged 14-20 (59 male and three female) in custody on remand in Hong Kong. Thirty eight boys and 21 girls under the age of 14 were on remand in homes run by the Social Welfare Department.

As at 17 December 1984, there were eight mentally disturbed persons in custody on remand in Hong Kong and 146 such persons serving sentences in correctional institutions.

The conditions in penal establishments in Hong Kong are satisfactory. Accommodation for prisoners is planned according to United Nations standards.

Libya (Detainees)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the British detainees now held in Libya.

Mr. Luce: We are continuing to use every available channel to secure the early release of the four British detainees. We are in close touch with their families and with the Archbishop of Canterbury whose personal representative, Mr. Terry Waite, is now in Libya. The release of the detainees would be a welcome and constructive development.

Plasma Technology (Visit)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken, following Mr. Jack Lacey's visit to Plasma Technology, to ensure that United States authorities are aware of Her Majesty's Government's views on United States officials visiting firms in the United Kingdom on official business, without first informing and seeking the approval of the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Rifkind: There are no restrictions on visits by United States officials to British companies on official business, provided they keep within British law; they need not inform or seek our approval. However, the United States authorities are aware of our view that United States officials should visit firms in the United Kingdom for the purpose of investigating possible breaches of United States laws only with the agreement of the appropriate United Kingdom Government Department.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Investment Programme

16. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the housing investment programme allocations for the current year.

Mr. Gow: No. The resources available for investment in 1984-85 have already been allocated in full.

35. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the housing investment programme allocation for 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbrown) on 18 December 1984 at column 92. Local authorities were informed of their HIP allocations on 20 December 1984.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the national allocation for local authority housing investment programmes for each year since 1965; what has been the number of council houses built each year since then; and what are the estimates for both of these services for 1985.

Mr. Gow: Housing investment programme (HIP) allocations were first made for 1978-79. Details of the allocations for authorities in England for each year since then, together with the number of council houses completed, are shown as follows. The Department has made no estimate of the number of completions in 1985-86.

	*HIP allocations (£ million cash)**	*Council house completions (excluding New Towns)*
1978-79	2,484	76,494
1979-80	2,544	70,017
1980-81	2,199	65,390
1981-82†	1,786	39,701
1982-83†	1,875	26,901
1983-84†	1,801	28,151
1984-85†	1,853	‡19,621
1985-86†	1,600	—

*The initial total available for allocation in each year is as shown. A number of changes were made subsequently in some years.

†Since 1981-82, local authorities have been able to supplement their basic HIP allocations by the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts.

‡Provisional figures from April to November 1984 only.

Housing Defects Act 1984

17. **Mr. Rooker** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase funds available to local authorities in connection with the implementation of the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Gow: Resources for investment in housing by local authorities have been decided in the light of their obligations under the Housing Defects Act. For housing investment programme allocations, we have introduced an indicator in the generalised needs index reflecting the need for expenditure on prefabricated reinforced concrete houses, including those in private ownership; and special

needs for expenditure of this type have also been taken into account, where appropriate, through the local discretionary element.

Local Government Bill

18. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish all the representations he has now received in response to the publication of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: No. It is for those making representations to decide whether to make their views more widely known.

Rates

19. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the average increase in rates for 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The average increase in rates will depend on local authorities' own budget decisions. If authorities budget at target the average increase should be in low single figures.

32. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made any estimate of the average increase in domestic rates following his announcement of the rate support grant settlement for 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The average increase in domestic rates will depend on local authorities' own budget decisions.

House Building (Land Supplies)

20. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he plans to take to help local authorities which have no more land available for building new houses.

Mr. Macfarlane: My Department issued advice on the supply of land for housing last July, in circular 15/84. The circular emphasises the role of structure and local plans in making provision for future housing requirements. It stresses the need to make full use of urban sites and to recycle urban land.

Block Grant

21. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum will be available in 1985-86 for distribution as block grant to local authorities; and how this compares with the current financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: If the House approves shortly the main rate support grant report for 1985-86 and the second supplementary report for 1984-85, block grant in the next financial year will be £8,480 million compared with £8,168 million this year.

Rate Support Grant

22. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have made direct representations to him about the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received at least 18 written representations directly from local authorities. In addition, several more have been passed to me by hon. Members.

London Docklands Development Corporation

23. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with the liason between the London Docklands Development Corporation and voluntary organisations in their areas within the London borough of Newham.

Sir George Young: Yes.

Rate-capping

24. **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has so far undertaken with the authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: None of the selected authorities applied for a redetermination of its expenditure level. Selected authorities have until 15 January to comment on the proposed rate and precept limits my right hon. Friend announced on 11 December.

System-built Tower Blocks

25. **Mr. Corbett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate he has of the cost of repairing structural and other faults in system-built tower blocks.

Sir George Young: No figures which relate specifically to system-built tower blocks are supplied to the Department by local authorities.

Birmingham (Urban Aid)

26. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will have further meetings with the city of Birmingham to discuss the matter of urban aid.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I will do so when I chair the next partnership committee meeting on 25 January.

GLC (Green Belt)

27. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what administrative arrangements he proposes to make to facilitate the transfer of the Greater London council's green belt holdings to the London boroughs under the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Macfarlane: The transfer of the GLC's interests in this land will be no different from the transfer of other property, that is by an order or orders to be made in due course under clause 92 of the Local Government Bill.

Prefabricated Concrete Homes (Mortgages)

28. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions between his Department and the Building Societies Association relating to the future mortgageability of prefabricated reinforced concrete homes designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department has now concluded its discussions with the National House Building Council

to establish agreed standards of repairs to the various types of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings designated under the Housing Benefits Act 1984.

Mr. Gow: I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Green Belt Land (Planning Applications)

29. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied with legislation and procedures relating to planning applications on sites in the metropolitan green belt.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Yes.

Thames Water Authority

30. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the anticipated increase in costs this year to Thames water authority consumers.

Mr. Macfarlane: The increases in Thames water charges for 1985-86 will be determined only when the authority fixes its budget, probably in mid-February, but I expect the increases to be less than 10 per cent.

British Boxing Board of Control

31. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the officers of the British Boxing Board of Control; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Macfarlane: I last met the officers of the British Boxing Board of Control on 22 July 1982. We discussed the British Medical Association's proposals to campaign for the abolition of boxing.

Local Government Reform

33. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following publication of the Local Government Bill in connection with the estimated costs of abolishing the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I continue to receive a number of submissions commenting on various aspects of our abolition proposals.

Nuclear Waste

34. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. on the discharge of nuclear waste.

Mr. Gow: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 18 December 1984 at column *93-94*.

Marine Nature Reserves

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made with plans to establish seven marine nature reserves as designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Progress on each of the seven sites identified by the Nature Conservancy Council for possible designation as marine nature reserves is as follows:

(i) Isles of Scilly.

Following adverse criticism from the Isles of Scilly sea fisheries committee of the original proposals, the Nature Conservancy Council decided to link them with action on the overall Isles of Scilly comprehensive land use and community development project sponsored by the Duchy of Cornwall and the council of the Isles of Scilly.

(ii) Lundy.

The original proposals having been rejected by the Devon sea fisheries committee in October 1984, the Nature Conservancy Council is currently considering what alternative approach is feasible.

(iii) Skomer.

Non-statutory consultation with interested bodies is at present in progress on the Nature Conservancy Council's proposals.

(iv) Menai Strait.

Preparatory work prior to the start of non-statutory consultation is virtually complete.

(v) Bardsey and Western Lleyn.

Preparatory work is in progress.

(vi) St. Abbs.

Preparatory work is in progress.

(vii) Loch Sween.

Preparatory work is in progress.

I am concerned about the problems over making progress and am considering what more might be done.

Local Government Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his present position with regard to the proposal that part-time employees should participate in his local government superannuation scheme.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Government have a long-standing commitment to make regulations allowing local authority part-time employees into the local government superannuation scheme. In the present climate, however, we have been reluctant to impose on local authorities the additional costs which they will have to bear by way of employers' contributions to the pension funds when the regulations are made. We have recognised that there will be compensating savings, both direct and indirect, in the longer term; but it has still been necessary to find ways of reducing or eliminating the immediate extra cost arising from the proposals.

Accordingly, I now propose that the regulations giving part-time employees who work for 15 to 30 hours per week the option of joining the pension scheme should also provide that all employees who are given this option will lose their eligibility for a gratuity in respect of future service. This should ensure that the overall savings which local authorities might be expected to achieve from the outset should broadly equal their additional contributions. I have therefore decided to proceed with the preparation and drafting of combined regulations on this basis.

Because of the extensive consultations that will be necessary, it would not be realistic to expect the regulations to be made before April 1986. However, in view of the inconvenience which the delay in announcing a decision about the proposals has caused to the employees who will be affected and to their employers, I am prepared to authorise local authorities who wish to bring eligible part-time employees into the pension scheme in advance of the regulations to do so, on the clear understanding that there will be no compensating increase in targets or Exchequer grants.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will be putting in hand the preparation of corresponding regulations for Scotland.

County Boundaries

Mr. Wiggin asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Boundary Commission for England has consulted local authorities about a review of the county boundaries;

(2) if inquiries have been made of hon. Members by the Boundary Commission for England in respect of the review of county boundaries.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England wrote on 6 June 1984 to non-metropolitan county councils, district councils and parish councils, and asked whether changes were considered desirable in the county. The purpose was to seek aid in formulating a programme for the reviews of counties, which the Commission is obliged to undertake by section 48(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. Hon. Members for constituencies in the areas concerned, and other persons who may be interested, will be informed when the commission undertakes a review: the timing of particular reviews is at the commission's discretion.

International Garden Festival

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the latest situation concerning the site of the international garden festival.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Negotiations between the Merseyside Development Corporation and Liverpool city council about the future of the international garden festival site are still taking place. Both sides are committed to retaining the 45-acre riverside park, promenade, festival hall and arena for long-term public use and the current negotiations concern the mechanism by which this can best be achieved.

In addition, for 1985, the MDC is finalising plans to open substantial parts of the remainder of the original festival site not immediately required for development.

I expect an announcement very soon.

Palace of Westminster

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost over the last five years of *(a)* internal and *(b)* external repairs and maintenance of the Palace of Westminster as a percentage of total Government spending.

Mr. Macfarlane: The total expenditure on repairs and maintenance on the parliamentary estate over the last five years has been:

	£ million
1979-80	3·044
1980-81	3·386
1981-82	4·153
1982-83	7·013
1983-84	6·485

Separate accounts are not kept for the Palace of Westminster alone, nor can internal and external work be separately distinguished. These amounts are all less than 0·01 per cent. of total Government spending in the year in question.

Isle of Dogs

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown of how many of the jobs in the enterprise zone in the Isle of Dogs have been transferred from other locations; and how many of the jobs in the enterprise zone have been newly created.

Sir George Young: The consultants who monitored economic activity in the zones reported that up to 31 May 1983 a net total of 77 firms had been established in the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone, employing 353 people. Of these, 186 were in jobs in new firms and 124 were in firms relocated from elsewhere; the origins of 20 firms, comprising 43 jobs were unknown.

The consultants also estimated that in the period 1 June to 31 December 1983 a further 451 jobs were established in the zone but I do not have any information as to what proportion of these jobs were in new firms.

South African Sports Centre (Director)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance Her Majesty's Government have given to the Sports Council regarding discussions and contact with Mr. E. Barlow at the South African sports office.

Mr. Macfarlane: The policy of Her Majesty's Government and the Sports Council is to support the Commonwealth statement on apartheid in sport and to discourage sporting contacts with South Africa. I have given no specific guidance regarding Mr. Barlow, but the Sports Council will act in accordance with its and the Government's policy.

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Minister in his Department with special responsibility for sport has met Mr. E. Barlow, the director of the South African sports office, in London; and if he has any plans to meet Mr. Barlow.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a separate breakdown in respect of each of the following metropolitan county councils, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Midlands, and Tyne and Wear, of the gross and net savings he estimates will accrue from their abolition.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: This information is not available. For details of the savings estimates I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 30 November at column *611*.

Urban Aid

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria his Department will use to allocate urban aid in the fiscal year 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Urban programme grant is allocated to local authorities in recognition of the special social need which exists in their areas, and according to guidelines set by Ministers. In 1985-86 resources will continue to be concentrated in areas of greatest need, taking account of the availability of alternative means of meeting those needs, and of the quality of programmes and projects put forward for support.

Water Authorities

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to provide direct election of members of water authorities.

Mr. Macfarlane: No.

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what methods are used to measure the efficiency of water authorities; if he will produce a table showing how each authority in England compares in efficiency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Water authorities produce an extensive series of performance indicators each year, based on agreed standard definitions. The latest series may be found in authorities' 1983-84 annual reports, copies of which have been placed in the Library. For further information, I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction on 10 December 1984 in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) at column *396*, when he reported the performance of English water authorities against their 1983-84 performance aims.

Water (Fluorine Content)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the source of the compounds of fluorine used to fluoridate the public water supply; how much is used per year; if there is any import content; what is the cost of the compound; and on whose Vote the cost falls.

Mr. Macfarlane: The compounds of fluorine used to fluoridate water supplies are manufactured by the chemical industry from natural mineral sources. Approximately 1,500 tonnes of hexafluorosilicic acid, which contains 16 per cent. fluorine, are used per year at an ex-works cost of about £83 per tonne. Approximately 200 tonnes of imported disodium hexfluorosilicate, which contains 60 per cent. fluorine, are used per year at a cost of about £180 per tonne. The cost of the compounds is borne on the Department of Health and Social Security Vote.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the known suppliers of the fluorine compounds referred to in clause 1(4) of the Water (Fluoridation) Bill.

Mr. Macfarlane: The main suppliers of hexafluorosilicic acid are Norsk Hydro Fertilisers Ltd. Currently the main suppliers of disodium hexafluorosilicate are Chemical and Feeds Ltd.

Council Houses (Repairs)

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of total council house rents in England was spent on repairs in the years 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Sir George Young: Local authorities fund repair and maintenance of their housing stock out of both capital and current accounts. Expenditure on repairs funded from capital is not identified separately from expenditure on improvement and conversion work. Current expenditure on repairs and maintenance represented 32·1 per cent. of net rental income in 1982-83 and 36·5 per cent. in 1983-84.

Greater London Council (Research Library)

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is yet in a position to announce his plans for the future of the Greater London council research library in the event of the abolition of the Greater London council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: No decision has yet been taken on the future of the Greater London research library.

Housing Starts

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council housing starts are planned for 1985.

Sir George Young: The Department has made no such estimate.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to underwrite a warranty scheme for homes covered by the Housing Defects Act;

(2) if any progress has been made on an approved warranty scheme for homes covered by the Housing Defects Act.

Mr. Gow: I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Water (Fluoride Ion Content)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the water authorities which increase the fluoride ion content of all or part of the public water supply in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Macfarlane: The Anglian, Northumbrian, North West, Severn-Trent, Thames, Yorkshire and Welsh water authorities increased the fluoride ion content of some of the public water supplies in their areas.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent medical research evidence he considered before introducing the Water (Fluoridation) Bill.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Group of Eight

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet the Group of Eight to discuss construction matters.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friend and I hope to meet the Group of Eight next month.

Unfit Dwellings

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment to what factors he attributes the increase between 1980 and 1984 of unfit dwellings indicated in his reply to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 21 December, *Official Report*, columns *402-3*.

Sir George Young: The figures quoted—an increase from 3·1 per cent. to 3·2 per cent. — are based on assessments by individual local authorities. The Department is not aware of any general factors which would account for the modest difference between the 1980 and 1984 figures.

High-rise Tower Blocks

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of numbers, districts and regions where high-rise tower blocks have been sold to *(a)* tenants, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* the private sector.

Sir George Young: The Secretary of State's specific consent to the disposal of tower blocks is normally required only where the property is tenanted, or where the freehold is to be conveyed to a management company formed of the occupants. No disposals of the latter kind have involved tower blocks. Nine tenanted blocks, comprising 1,050 flats, were conveyed to the Stockbridge Village Trust in April 1983.

Information about the disposal of vacant blocks is not readily available because such disposals do not normally require my right hon. Friend's specific consent. My Department is however conducting research studies of some of these disposals and I will write to the hon. Member about this work.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the dwellings in excess of households are accounted for by second homes and homes unfit for occupation, respectively.

Sir George Young: In England in 1981 there were estimated to be some 160,000 permanent second homes and some 1·12 million unfit dwellings. The figure for second homes is based on a sample survey conducted by Audits of Great Britain Ltd; that for unfit dwellings from the "English House Condition Survey 1981", part 1.

Airports

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment to what criteria he gives priority in determining planning applications for new airports and for airport developments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: Planning applications for all types of airport development are considered on their merits. The factors taken into account will vary according to the scale and type of development in question.

They will usually include the impact on the environment, and it is often necessary to weigh any adverse effects environmental or otherwise against the positive aspects of the public interest in the development.

NATIONAL FINANCE

United States Government Officials (Visits)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many incidents he is aware of apart from the visit of Mr. Jack Lacey to Plasma Technology, where United States Government officials have visited companies within the United Kingdom on official business without first informing, and seeking the agreement of, the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Hayhoe: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have been generally aware that the United States Customs attachés based at the American embassy in London make visits to companies within the United Kingdom from time to time. The United States authorities are, however, now aware of Her Majesty Government's view that United States Customs attachés should obtain the agreement of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise before visiting companies in the United Kingdom about possible breaches of United States law.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of visits made by officials from *(a)* the United States Department of Commerce, and *(b)* the United States Customs of which he has been advised or which have been requested by the United States since the beginning of 1983.

Mr. Hayhoe:
(a) Six.
(b) None.

E C Supplementary Budget

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the implementation of the inter-governmental agreement for additional finance for the European Communities' 1984 supplementary budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Community's need for the United Kingdom's contribution is now urgent and the Government have therefore decided to seek Parliament's approval for payment of £119·218 million as quickly as possible. As has since been confirmed by the High Court and the Court of Appeal, the laying of a draft section 1(3) order in November was an appropriate and lawful procedure for seeking Parliament's authority for the payment. Although the Government believe that the use of section 1(3) to provide for a payment made in 1985 remains lawful, in order to enable payment to be made as soon as possible and for the avoidance of doubt since the IGA refers to payment in 1984, they propose to seek parliamentary authority for the payment of £119·218 million by means of a Supplementary Estimate which is being presented today.

A special Consolidated Fund Bill will be introduced shortly.

Economic Indices

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will circulate in the *Official*

Report a table showing for each quarter since 1 January 1973 the percentage increase in the money supply, domestic credit expansion, wholesale prices, retail prices, gross domestic product and the real money supply;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each quarter since the beginning of 1977 the percentage increase in the money supply and the percentage increase in retail prices two years later.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No. The *Official Report* is not a statistical abstract. The hon. Member's attention has, on numerous occasions, been drawn to the publications in which such information as is available may be found.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing in index form the changes in the money supply, velocity of circulation, prices and output between 1979 and the latest available date, in each case; and whether these economic indices have performed as he expected at that time.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information requested on past behaviour can be derived from *Economic Trends*, tables 8, 42 and 52. The assumptions for output and prices on which policy has been based, and the target ranges for monetary growth, have been set out in successive versions of the MTFS.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised from stamp duty on property in 1984.

Mr. Moore: Information is available only for the period January to October 1984. The provisional figure for stamp duty raised on land and property, (other than stocks and shares) in that period is £370 million.

Public Sector Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the total figure for United Kingdom public sector employment and *(b)* the figure for each principle Government Department in 1983 and 1984; and what percentage of the total employed labour force was represented by the public sector in each of those years.

Mr. Hayhoe: No figures are yet available for public sector employment in 1984. Figures for 1983 as at the middle of the year can be found on page 101 of the March 1984 edition of *Economic Trends*. Numbers of staff at 1 July 1983 and 1984 in principal Government Departments can be found in summaries of the "Civil Service Quarterly Staff Returns". All these documents are available in the House of Commons Library.

Workplace Nurseries

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what advice the Inland Revenue gave to the Equal Opportunities Commission concerning the taxability of workplace nursery benefits;

(2) what advice the Inland Revenue has given to the Consumers' Association in relation to the taxation of workplace nurseries; and on what date the advice was given.

Mr. Moore: The Equal Opportunities Commission wrote to the Board of Inland Revenue on 2 February 1983 to ask whether the advice in its manual "Setting-Up a Workplace Nursery" was correct. The board replied on 17 February explaining the proper tax treatment of employer subsidised nurseries in the hands of directors and those employees currently earning at a rate of £8,500 a year or more. The Inland Revenue have no record of having given any previous advice. Similar advice was given to the Consumers' Association on 24 November 1983 when an error in the "Which: Tax Guide" came to the board's attention.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Inland Revenue takes to ensure that local tax officers' interpretation of the law relating to the taxability of workplace nurseries reflect the advice being issued by central departments of the Revenue.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Board of Inland Revenue regularly issues advice and guidance to local tax offices on the correct tax treatment of various items as the need arises.

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the current level for taxation of workplace nurseries and other benefits in kind if the level of 1948 had been maintained in real terms.

Mr. Lawson: If the 1948-49 earnings threshold for assessing benefits in kind in the hands of employees had been maintained by reference to movements in the Index of Retail Prices, it would now be about £22,500.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Wiggin asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what rate value added tax could be lowered and produce the same yield if all exemptions to the tax were removed.

Mr. Hayhoe: About 9 per cent. if the tax was levied on all items of consumers' expenditure except rates, other statutory charges and certain sevices for which there would be practical difficulties.

Mr. Gregory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimated revenue would be obtained in a full year from introducing value added tax at a rate of 25 per cent. on each of the goods which were formerly taxed at the 25 per cent. rate under purchase tax, broken down by the former categories used for that purpose.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is estimated that levying value added tax at 25 per cent. on all items which were subject to purchase tax at 25 per cent. in 1972-73 (its last year of operation) would yield net additional revenue at 1984-85 prices of about £1,800 million in a full year. However, I regret that insufficient information is available on which to base a breakdown of this estimate into the detailed categories of goods used formerly for purchase tax purposes. The estimate includes value added tax on cars and motor cycles, which are now subject to an additional charge (car tax) introduced with value added tax to maintain a level of taxation comparable to that under purchase tax.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has now received against any introduction of value added tax on *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* books and periodicals, *(c)* children's shoes and *(d)* children's clothes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The approximate number of representations which have been received by Treasury Ministers on the topics mentioned is as follows:

(a) and *(b)* 900
(c) 320
(d) 40

£1 Note

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he made, before deciding to discontinue the £1 note, of the extra costs that would arise to users from the switch to the £1 coin; if he will set out his assessment of these costs by category; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is impractical to make a precise calculation of the relative advantages and disadvantages to specific sectors for many reasons, including the likelihood of behavioural changes following the discontinuation of the note. However, many interests outside central Government who might be involved in cash handling on any scale were consulted.

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional transport costs will arise from the discontinuance of the £1 note relating to the transport from the Mint to the banks of additional £1 coins; who will bear these costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Transport costs of maintaining the £1 unit will be reduced as a result of replacing the £1 note with a £1 coin. Although the cost of transporting a given quantity of £1 coins is greater than the cost of transporting an equivalent value of £1 notes, the notes need replacing very frequently.

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the weight of £10,000 worth of new £1 notes; and what is the corresponding weight of the same sum in £1 coins.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The weight of £10,000 in new notes is 7·31 kilograms; the weight of the same value in coins is 95 kilograms.

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the implications for staffing levels in the relevant production departments of the switch from £1 notes to £1 coins.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Following the introduction of the £1 coin the Bank of England has pursued a policy of minimal replacement of staff leaving its printing works. Natural wastage has, therefore, accounted for a large part of the staff reduction which will be consequent upon ceasing to issue the £1 note. Combined with early pension and voluntary severance arrangements it is anticipated that staff reductions will be achieved without the need for compulsory redundancy.

It is not possible precisely to forecast future annual demand for the £1 coin after the initial stage of bulk replacement has taken place, but the direct effect of staffing levels is expected to be negligible.

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many £1 notes were issued in each of the last five years; and how many £1 coins were issued in 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Issues of £1 units over the last five years were as follows:

	Notes (millions)	*Coins (millions)*
1980	928	—
1981	795	—
1982	746	—
1983	659	171
1984	744	42

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many man hours are required to produce *(a)* a £1 note and *(b)* a £1 coin.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It takes 0·25 man hours to produce 1000 £1 notes from the receipt of bank notepaper up to but not including final distribution. The corresponding production time for 1000 £1 coins is 0·13 man hours. Because of the need for much more frequent replacement, the note is more expensive to distribute.

Mr. Favell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what costs in terms of new or adapted machinery have been incurred for the production of £1 coins in each financial year to date.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No machinery has been purchased or adapted specifically for production of £1 coins.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will consider extending the deadline for printing £1 notes.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Bank of England has ceased to print £1 notes in line with the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement that issue of £1 notes would cease after 31 December.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider introducing a higher denomination note, such as a £2·50 note, to replace the £1 note.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received in favour of keeping the £1 note to date.

Mr. Ian Stewart: About 1,350 letters have been received to date in response to the decision to cease issuing £1 notes. Most of them are critical of the decision in one way or another, although many of these concentrate on aspects of the £1 coin rather than the note.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any views on the possibility of some clearing banks producing their own £1 notes.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to include in the next "Economic Progress Report", a chart comparing actual unemployment figures with the figures for the relevant period predicted by independent forecasters and the assumptions for the relevant period provided by the Government to the Government Actuary.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

EC Budget

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the expenditure of the European Economic Communities for 1984 authorised prior to the introduction of supplementary budget No. 1, together with the expenditure authorised by that budget, for each main purpose and under subheadings of obligatory and non-obligatory expenditure, respectively.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Basic and Social Infrastructure

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he measures the rate of return on *(a)* basic infrastructure and *(b)* social infrastructure.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Construction Industry

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the contribution of the construction industry to the economy in respect of gross domestic product, employment, exports and tax revenue, including building materials producers where appropriate; and how the position compares with five and 10 years previously.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

High Technology Exports

Mr. Ashdown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many requests he has received since the beginning of 1982 from the United States authorities for legal action to be taken against firms or individuals in the United Kingdom in relation to high technology exports; and how many have resulted in positive actions by his Department.

Mr. Hayhoe: None.

Books (Prosecutions)

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions have been mounted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise since 1979 against books listed in the edition of *British Books in Print* current at the time of prosecution.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

"British Books in Print"

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to which editions of *British Books in Print* the Minister of State's letter of 20 December to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras refers; and when the book was bought or borrowed by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Hayhoe: My letter of 20 December to the hon. Member referred to the 1984 edition of *British Books in Print*. The book which was consulted by the staff concerned had been bought by the library of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in October 1984.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Galley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information about individual occupational pension schemes is held by the superannuation funds office.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1984, c. *66*]: The superannuation funds office holds information received by the Board of Inland Revenue concerning pension schemes seeking tax approval under chapter II, part II, Finance Act 1970. This information includes the deed constituting the scheme, current rules, number of members, identity of the administrator and particulars of the employer. Additional information, including particulars of investments, is held for self-administered schemes with fewer than 12 members. In some cases the office holds information relevant to the tax affairs of individual members and employers.

The office also holds information in respect of retirement annuity contracts approved for the purposes of retirement annuity relief.

Gross Domestic Product

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the gross domestic product was represented by taxation, including national insurance contributions and local authority rates in 1984; and whether he will provide a breakdown of the percentage figure between taxes on income, taxes on expenditure, national insurance, capital taxes, stamp duty and rates in 1984 and for each year from 1979 onwards.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 December 1984, c. *325*]: The information is in the following table.

Percentage of gross domestic product at market prices

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	**1984-85*
Taxes on income	13·4	14·0	15·1	15·2	14·9	15·7
Taxes on expenditure	11·9	11·9	12·5	12·1	12·0	11·9
National insurance contributions	5·8	6·1	6·3	6·6	7·0	7·0
Capital taxes	0·5	0·5	0·6	0·5	0·5	0·5
Stamp duty	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·4	0·3
Local authority rates	3·4	3·7	4·2	4·3	4·1	3·9
Total†	35·2	36·4	39·1	39·0	38·8	39·2
of which North Sea taxes‡	1·1	1·7	2·4	2·7	2·9	3·6

* Estimate.
† Components may not sum to total because of rounding.
‡ Before Advanced Corporation Tax set-off.

Taxation Allowances

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates would be the cost in 1985-86 of *(a)* indexing married and single person allowances, *(b)* increasing married and single personal allowances at twice the rate of inflation, *(c)* increasing the married man's tax allowance by the rate of inflation, *(d)* indexing the single person's tax allowance by the rate of inflation and *(e)* providing a tax allowance to spouses not in receipt of income equal to 10 per cent., 20 per cent., 30 per cent., 50 per cent., 75 per cent. and 100 per cent. of the single person's allowance.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *359*]: Indexation of the main income tax allowances and higher rate thresholds (by 4·75 per cent.) in 1985-86 would have a direct revenue cost of £860 million in 1985-86 (and £1,115 million in a full year) compared to the position if allowances and thresholds remained at 1984-85 levels. The table shows the direct revenue costs of the specified changes (at forecast 1985-86 levels of income) assuming that all other allowances and thresholds remain at their 1984-85 levels. Costs are shown below against the 1984-85 base and the indexed base. The revenue projections in the autumn statement assume revalorisation of the main direct tax allowances and thresholds (and of specific duties) by 4·75 per cent.

Direct revenue costs

£ million

	Against 1984-85 allowance levels		*Against 1985-86 indexed base*	
	1985-86	*Full year*	*1985-86*	*Full year*
(a) allowances indexed by 4·75 per cent.	770	960	−90	−155
(b) allowances increased by 9·5 per cent.	1,550	1,920	690	805
(c) AM and AAM indexed	440	550	−420	−565
(d) AS, WEIA and AAS indexed	330	410	−530	−705

AM, AAM: ordinary and age allowance for married men.
AS, AAS: ordinary and age allowance for single people.
WEIA: wife's earned income allowance.

(e) The direct revenue costs of increasing the total allowance available to a married couple where the wife has no earned income are estimated to be as follows. All changes are measured on top of indexation (at 1985-86 income levels):

Direct revenue cost

Increase in total allowance £	*1985-86 £ million*	*Full year £ million*
210	280	350
420	560	680
630	830	1,025
1,050	1,375	1,700
1,580	2,060	2,550
2,100	2,750	3,400

Privatised Public Corporations

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for each of the public corporations privatised in the period 1979 to 1984 (i) the gross proceeds from flotation or sale, (ii) the prior claims on such proceeds to meet contingent liabilities such as underfunded pension schemes, (iii) commissions, fees, advertising expenses etc. paid to merchant bankers and other advisers and (iv) the net proceeds accruing to the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *357*]: The following table gives the information requested in parts (i) and (iv) of the hon. Member's question. Only in the case of the National Freight Company was a payment in respect of a deficiency in pension funds netted off from gross sale receipts; the sum involved was 48·7 million. The total cost of fees and commissions paid to primary underwriters, sub-underwriters, financial advisers, legal advisers, auditors and stockbrokers for each privatisation was given in my earlier reply to the hon. Member on 21 December.

£ million

Company	*Gross proceeds*	*Net proceeds*
British Aerospace	149	*43
Cable and Wireless (1981)	225	†182
Amersham International	66	64
Britoil	639	627
National Freight Company	53·5	‡4·6
Associated British Ports (1983)	48	46
Enterprise Oil	392	¶381
British Telecom	‖3,916	not available

* In addition to sale expenses, a capital injection of £100 million was netted off sale proceeds.

† In addition to sale expenses, the Government subscribed £35 million for new shares issued at the time of sale.

‡ In addition to sale proceeds, a payment in respect of pension funds deficiency of £48·7 million was netted off sale proceeds.

‖ Latest estimate.

¶ Gross proceeds, payable in three tranches. Net proceeds not yet determined.

The sales of Jaguar and Sealink were conducted by BL and British Rail respectively, which retained the sale proceeds.

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish an update of the table on shareholdings in privatised public corporations given in reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 29 July, *Official Report*, columns *725-8*.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *357*.]: The following table gives the information requested. The sale of Jaguar was conducted by BL and the information requested is a matter for the company, not the Government. However I understand that the figures are as given in the table.

	British Aerospace	*Cable and Wireless*	*Amersham International*	*Britoil*	*Associated British Ports*	*Enterprise Oil*	*¶Jaguar*	*British Telecom*
(a) Proportion of shares sold (per cent.)†	51·6	*49·36	100	51	51·5	100	100	50·2
(b) Number of shares sold†	100,000,000	133,285,000	50,000,000	255,410,510	20,600,000	212,000,000	177,880,000	3,012,000,000

	British Aerospace	Cable and Wireless	Amersham International	Britoil	Associated British Ports	Enterprise Oil	*Jaguar	British Telecom
(c) Proportion of total issued share capital initially reserved for employees (per cent.)	5·8	5	5	6	5·6	0·3	·5	up to 5
(d) Number of shares applied for by employees	10,612,008	3,785,833	2,014,140	580,610	1,856,875	61,250	2,300,000	128,500,000
(e) Number of shares allocated to employees	7,072,300	3,785,833	1,828,290	580,610	1,736,965	61,250	2,300,000	114,800,000
(f) Proportion of total work force becoming shareholders (per cent.)	74	99	‡99	72	91	71	·19	93
(g) Proportion of total issued share capital initially held by employees (per cent.)	3·6	1·4	3·7	0·1	4·3	0·03	1·3	1·9

* A subsequent rights issue (March 1983) not taken up by Government, increased the proportion of Cable and Wireless shares held in the private sector to 55 per cent.
† These figures include shares allocated free to employees, except for Enterprise Oil and Jaguar where no shares were so allocated.
‡ Excludes overseas employees.
A further 2·5 per cent. of total issued share capital was reserved for BL employees, 2·4 per cent. of whom became shareholders holding a further 0·9 per cent. of the share capital.
* The figures for the number of shares allocated to employees do not include shares held in trust for employees under Jaguar's employee share incentive scheme.

Wages

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the national average wage in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, and the tax threshold for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple; and if he will show *(a)* and *(b)* as a percentage of the national average wage for each of those years.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *357*]: The table gives the information requested for the financial years 1978-79 to 1984-85. The figures of average earnings are estimates for full-time males (all occupations) paid at adult rates. Earnings have been assumed to increase by 7½ per cent. between 1983-84 and 1984-85 — the underlying rate of increase assumed by the Government Actuary in his recent report.

		Tax threshold		Tax threshold as a percentage of average earnings	
	Average earnings (£ per year)	Single person £	Married man £	Single person Per cent.	Married man Per cent.
1978-79	4,831	985	1,535	20·4	31·8
1979-80	5,689	1,165	1,815	20·5	31·9
1980-81	6,838	1,375	2,145	20·1	31·4
1981-82	7,592	1,375	2,145	18·1	28·3
1982-83	8,190	1,565	2,445	19·1	29·9
1983-84	8,892	1,785	2,795	20·1	31·4
1984-85	9,558	2,005	3,155	21·0	33·0

Pension Funds

Sir William Clark asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what amount of extra revenue would accrue to the Exchequer in a full year if *(a)* lump sum payments to pensioners from pension funds were taxed at the standard rate, *(b)* employer's contributions to occupational pension funds were disallowed for corporation tax purposes and *(c)* employee's contributions to occupational pension funds were disallowed for income tax purposes;

(2) if he will estimate the amount of extra revenue which could accrue to the Exchequer if, in the case of occupational pensions *(a)* employers' contributions were not allowed as a charge against profits, *(b)* all investment income of occupational pension funds were taxed at the stadard rate, *(c)* all capital gains of occupational pension funds were taxed at the standard rate, *(d)* employers' contributions were taxed as a fringe benefit of the employee.

Mr. Moore: The estimates shown below are of the direct revenue effects of the reliefs on tax liabilities in 1984-85, taking the levels of pension contributions, pension fund investment income and pension payments that arise, given the existence of the reliefs. The figures cannot, therefore, be interpreted as indicating the tax yield which might result from a change in the tax rules, as no account has been taken of changes in levels and methods of provision for retirement that might occur following such changes. Each estimate has been calculated independently, and the combined effect of more than one cannot therefore be calculated by summing the figures.

	Full year cost £ million
Employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes allowed as a deduction for income tax purposes	1,250
Employers' contributions to occupational pension schemes allowed as a charge against profits for corporation tax purposes	*†1,600
Employers' contributions not taxed as a benefit in kind of the employee	*†2,100
Investment income of occupational pension funds (assuming tax at the basic rate)	2,500
Lump sum payments to pensioners (assuming tax at the basic rate)	900

* These estimates are particular tentative.
† Alternatives.

I regret that a reliable estimate of the cost of exempting capital gains realised by pension funds is not available.

The revenue that would accrue from abolition of these reliefs would also depend on any transitional provisions, designed to avoid retrospective taxation.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Drugs (Standardisation)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set up a departmental feasibility study into the standardisation of presentation of drugs and medications so that, irrespective of the manufacturer, the patient will at all times obtain an identical preparation with a standardised code whenever possible.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. We have no evidence of any need for such a study.

Contraceptive Pill

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies he intends to initiate on the correlation of long-term use of the contraceptive pill with breast and cervical cancer.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Many studies are being conducted in this country and abroad on the long-term effects of the contraceptive pill, including possible association with breast and cervical cancer. As the results of these studies start to become available, they are carefully monitored by our Department and by the Committee on Safety of Medicines, in co-operation with regulatory authorities in other countries and with the World Health Organisation. The committee, which advises Ministers on the safety of all medicinal products, keeps the safety of oral contraceptives under constant review.

Dental Treatment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to ensure that patients who receive dental treatment under the National Health Service are given a full statement of the treatment they have and of the costs being claimed by dental practitioners arising from such treatment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. Such a statement would be costly to produce and of little value to the patient.

Child Abuse Offenders

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provision he intends to make to establish further therapy and counselling services for child abuse offenders.

Mr. John Patten: We are currently reviewing the guidance we have issued to authorities and their agencies on the handling of child abuse cases. As part of that review we shall, together with the Home Office, be considering the provision of therapy and counselling services for child abuse offenders.

Unemployed Patients (Advisory Services)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he plans to establish any special advisory services for unemployed patients admitted to hospitals following heart attacks or unsuccessful attempts at suicide.

Mr. John Patten: No. But I am sending the hon. Member a copy of a report prepared by a multi-disciplinary working party on the management of cases of deliberate self-harm, which we circulated to health authorities last month (circular HN (84)25); we have asked district health authorities to consider reviewing local arrangements for the management of such cases in the light of that report.

Drug Addicts

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make additional funds available to enable centres for the rehabilitation of drug addicts which are presently threatened with closure to remain open.

Mr. John Patten: We are aware of only one centre for the rehabilitation of drug misusers which may be threatened with early closure. The voluntary organisation concerned has made an application for funds to the Department and we will let it know the outcome as soon as possible. More generally, my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 13 December 1984 that a further £3 million will be available centrally—in addition to the £7 million previously made available—to improve services for drug misusers. Such funding is of course only available for a limited period as we normally expect local projects, once established, to attract local funding.

Alcohol Abuse

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific steps he intends to take during the next three years to reduce the level of alcohol abuse.

Mr. John Patten: The Government set out their general approach to the problems caused by misuse of alcohol in the discussion document "Drinking Sensibly" published in 1981. This document recognised that attempts to influence the minority who misuse alcohol must, if they are to be realistic, respect the freedom of the majority who use alcohol responsibly. The document concluded that the reduction of alcohol misuse and the harm it causes requires a range of action by central and local government, voluntary and community bodies, the health professions and institutions, business—including the drinks trade—and trade unions.

Within this framework the Department, in conjunction with other bodies such as the Health Education Council, continues to seek better information through surveys and research about the incidence and causes of problem drinking; to encourage health education to lead to healthier life styles, and earlier identification and help for the problem drinker at work; to assist statutory and voluntary action in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation; to influence professional education and to sponsor training initiatives, to alert and equip service providers to intervene earlier, and more effectively, in problem drinking in the course of their everyday work. These activities will be pursued throughout the next three years.

The Department also gives substantial grant aid to Alcohol Concern, the National Agency on Alcohol Misuse, which was formally established in 1984. I understand that this organisation is likely to take on an increasing role in the fields of prevention, training and in improving the network of local voluntary agencies and their collaboration with statutory agencies.

Child Sex Abuse

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what co-operation has taken place between his Department and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in dealing with cases involving child sex abuse and in helping parents found guilty of committing such offences to reintegrate into family life.

Mr. John Patten: We are currently reviewing the procedural guidance we have issued to authorities and

agencies on child abuse. Existing guidance—which was last reviewed in 1980—does not specifically address child sexual abuse. As the current review goes forward we shall be consulting the NSPCC and other statutory and voluntary agencies who have developed expertise in the handling of cases of child sexual abuse. These discussions will take place in 1985.

Foot Abnormality and Ailments

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish for each of the last five years expenditure by the National Health Service on the treatment of non-inherited foot abnormality and ailments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect the specific information requested centrally.

Tinnitus

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the number of tinnitus sufferers in the Leicester area.

Mr. John Patten: We do not collect this sort of detailed local information centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to seek information from the chairman of the Leicestershire health authority.

Nurses (Injuries)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many National Health Service employed nurses lost their jobs as a result of injury sustained at work in each of the last five years;

(2) how many National Health Service employed nurses lost their jobs as a result of back pain or back injury sustained at work in each of the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this sort of detailed information centrally.

Hospitals (Child Care Facilities)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have child care facilities for staff or patients.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally. It is for health authorities to decide what facilities are required locally.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the results of his Department's investigations and inquiries which claim to show that in other countries with similar arrangements to the proposed limited list savings have been immediate and worthwhile and no damage has been caused to patient care;

(2) which countries with limited list drug schemes were studied by his Department prior to the announcement of the limited list; and when the studies were started for each country.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We keep abreast of developments worldwide in the provision of drugs by subsidised schemes and we made a particular effort to bring our information up to date last summer. Information was collected on schemes in the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Holland, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Much of the information obtained in the course of inquiries preceding our announcement on 8 November was given in confidence by foreign Governments and it would not be proper for me to disclose it.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any savings that arise from any form of limited list will be to the benefit of the National Health Service.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what part of the National Health Service he intends to devote any savings which may arise from limited list prescribing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Limited lists of drugs in certain therapeutic groups are being introduced to restrain the continued high growth in the drugs bill. The estimated savings have been taken into account in the level of spending on the National Health Service for 1985-86 announced at the time of the Autumn Statement.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will consult Help the Aged, Age Concern, the Sue Ryder Foundation, the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign, the Spastics Society, the Royal Society of Primary Health Care Nursing, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the National Ankylosing Spondylitis Society, the Marie Curie Memorial Foundation, the National Society for Epilepsy and the Leukaemia Society about his proposed limited list of drugs;

(2) if he will consult the Renal Society, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Nursing, the Epilepsy Foundation, the District Nursing Association, the National Society for Cancer Relief, the Cancer Aftercare and Rehabilitation Society, the Haemophilia Society, the Ileamostamy Association, the British Red Cross Society, the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, the British Kidney Patient Association, the British Epilepsy Association, the British Diabetic Association, the Back Pain Association, the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council and the Patients' Association, about his proposed limited list of drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I would welcome any comments or suggestions from these organisations on the drugs for inclusion in the final limited list.

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, if a limited list is introduced, whether dispensing general practitioners will be permitted to sell branded products against a private prescription.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 5 December 1984 at column *220*. We are still considering this.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list for the last three years for which figures are available the number of prescriptions dispensed for each drug in the therapeutic categories covered by the Government's limited list proposals which are not included in the provisional list circulated with the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 14 December, indicating whether the drug required a prescription;

(2) if he will list the drugs in the therapeutic categories affected by the Government's limited list proposals currently available under National Health Service prescription which are not included in the provisional list circulated with the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 14 December to all doctors, indicating those for which a generic alternative will not be available under prescription under the National Health Service, whether or not a prescription is currently required, and the proportion of current prescriptions for those drugs which are prescribed for people entitled to free prescriptions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are presently consulting on the content of the limited list. Until this consultation is complete it will not be possible to start compiling the list of medicines which will no longer be available under the National Health Service. Our stated intention is to ensure that, within the categories of drugs to be included in the limited list, there will be an adequate range of effective drugs sufficient to meet all clinical needs.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many general practitioners have been involved to date in formulating the provisional limited list of drugs circulated with the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 14 December.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All general practitioners have been invited by the Chief Medical Officer to comment on the provisional limited list of drugs. Some 650 have done so to date.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the introduction of limited list prescribing was recommended in the Binder Hamlyn report on general practice.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The recommendations of the consultants, Binder Hamlyn, will, where appropriate be considered in the forthcoming Green Paper on primary health care. The report did not make detailed recommendations on prescribing.

Drug Companies (Inducements)

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has a policy on the inducements drug companies may reasonably offer to general practitioners to prescribe a particular product.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We support the advice given by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in its code of practice. This states inter alia that gifts in the form of articles designed as promotional aids, whether related to a particular product or of general utility, may be distributed to members of the medical profession provided the gift is inexpensive and relevant to the practice of medicine.

This is reinforced in the General Medical Council's booklet "Professional Conduct and Discipline: Fitness to Practice" which advises that doctors should avoid accepting any pecuniary or material inducement which might compromise, or be regarded by others as likely to compromise the independent exercise of their professional judgment in prescribing matters.

Drug Companies

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those companies which received more than £100 million from the National Health Service for drugs supplied to it in the last financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Only the companies comprising the Glaxo group received, in aggregate, more than £100 million in respect of National Health Service medicines.

Portable Pensions

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he received on the consultation documentation on personal portable pensions.

Mr. Whitney: The closing date for comments on "Personal Pensions: A Consultative Document" was 30 November. To date the Department has received 100 responses from individuals and 174 from representative bodies and companies.

Medical and Nursing Schools

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines he intends to issue to medical and nursing schools about instruction in religious beliefs, cultural patterns and the medical and emotional problems of Asian and other ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. These are matters for the General Medical Council as part of its responsibility for issuing recommendations on basic medical education and for the English National Board as part of its responsibility for the training of nurses, midwives and health visitors.

Health Data (Draft Code)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available to ensure that disclosure of personal health data is applied strictly according to the health data draft code.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We envisage that health authorities will be able to operate the necessary management arrangements to ensure that disclosures are made only in accordance with the provisions of the code within available resources.

Sterilisation Operations (Failures)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of failed sterilisation operations have occurred during the last three years; and what levels of compensation were paid out to patients involved as a result.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to assess the number of failed sterilisation operations performed on women; and what guidelines he will issue to health authorities as a result.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no plans to introduce the central collection of statistics on the number of failed sterilisations nor to issue guidance to health authorities.

The success rate of the operation is taken into account by doctors when they explain the procedure to their patients and obtain consent.

NHS Management Board (Personnel Director)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made towards the appointment to the National Health Service management board of a personnel director.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The appointment of a personnel director will be considered by the chairman of the NHS Management Board, who took up post on 1 January 1985.

Asian Mother and Baby Campaign

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in making the National Health Service more accessible to Asian communities resulting from the Asian Mother and Baby campaign initiative launched by his Department in collaboration with the Save the Children Fund.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The campaign has stimulated interest and been widely welcomed, and I took part in the first local launch of a link-worker scheme in Birmingham last month. The scheme will be extended successively to some eight or nine other areas in the course of this year. It is therefore too early to assess its impact, but it is intended to carry out a full evaluation of both the health educational campaign and the link-worker scheme over the next two to three years.

NHS (Notices and Leaflets)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what provisions will be made for printing notices and instruction leaflets in foreign languages in National Heath Service hospitals and clinics for ethnic minority community patients.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This is primarily a matter for individual health authorities to determine in the light of local needs, although attention was drawn to the need for hospital and clinic signs in the most commonly used community languages in "Providing Effective Health Care in a Multi-racial Society: A checklist for looking at local issues" which was distributed to health authorities by Training in Health and Race. Also the Health Education Council has produced a number of leaflets for members of the ethnic minority communities, particularly in connection with the Stop Rickets and Asian Mother and Baby Campaigns.

Nystagmus

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that all National Health Service patients who suffer from nystagmus are aware of the methods of treating it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Ensuring that a patient who suffers from a disease is appropriately informed about methods of treating it is a task for the patient's doctor.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average waiting time in National Health Service hospitals for the diagnosis and treatment of nystagmus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect sufficient information centrally to give a reliable estimate.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has offered any guidance to health authorities about the funds they should allocate for the treatment of nystagmus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We advise health authorities to decide on the allocation of the funds available to them between various specialties on the basis of their own best judgment of local priorities.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) in which cities or regions there are centres of excellence for researching and treating nystagmus;

(2) if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the number and names of the research studies into nystagmus during the last ten years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Facilities for the treatment of nystagmus are available in all neurology and some ophthalmology departments.

I understand the Medical Research Council, the main Government funded body supporting research in this field from its grant-in-aid under the science budget of the Department of Education and Science, have been supporting the following four research studies during the last 10 years:

MRC hearing and balance unit—Nottingham

Electronystagmographic investigation of induced vestibular nystagmus, octokinetic nystagmus, spontaneous nystagmus and disordered eye movements.

Imperial college, London

(i) Objective analysis of vestibular nystagmus.

(ii) Applications of biological signal analysis — analysis of electro cochleograms, auditory — evoked brain stem and cortical E.E.C. responses and perceptual responses to binaural stimuli, objective quantification and interpretation of nystagmus responses to unilateral vestibular stimuli.

University of Manchester—department of ophthalmic optics

Visual perception with congenital nystagmus.

It is open to any researcher to submit an application to the council, which would examine it for scientific merit — applications are not restricted to "centres of excellence".

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of ophthalmic opticians, doctors and research workers in the National Health Service who specialise in testing and researching into nystagmus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All ophthalmic opticians are trained in the detection of nystagmus, and all neurologists and ophthalmologists are trained in its detection and treatment. Information about numbers involved in research is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if all ophthalmic opticians in the National Health Service receive special training for the detection and treatment of nystagmus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: All ophthalmic opticians in the National Health Service are trained in the detection of nystagmus, but their role in treating it is normally confined to the provision of corrective spectacles. When an ophthalmic optician detects nystagmus in a patient, he is required to refer that patient to a doctor.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of adults and the number of children who suffer from nystagmus.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Nystagmus may be a symptom of a number of conditions and it is not, therefore, possible to estimate the number of people who suffer from it.

London Refraction Hospital

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why one of the clinics at the London Refraction hospital is empty and unused;

(2) what study he has made of the financial position of the London Refraction hospital; and what proposals he has for additional funding.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The London Refraction hospital is not an NHS establishment accountable to us but is operated independently as a registered charity. We have no information, therefore, about the use of clinics at the hospital and we have not made a study of its financial position.

The hospital is paid the usual fee for any NHS sight tests carried out there and may apply for financial assistance for providing refresher training courses for opticians which are relevant to the general opthalmic service. We have no proposals for additional funding.

Pensions (Payments Overseas)

Sir Peter Emery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons who receive payment of their retirement pension have this paid to them overseas; and how much money is involved.

Mr. Whitney: On 31 December 1982, the latest date for which we have firm figures, 289,893 people receiving British retirement pension were living abroad. The cost of paying pensions to them was then about £206 million. It is estimated that this cost has now risen to about £250 million, partly as a result of an increase in the number of pensioners. Later figures are not obtainable owing to the industrial action at Newcastle central office.

NHS Beds (Statistics)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown by region of the number of National Health Service beds which are available for (a) patients undergoing artificial insemination treatment and (b) invitro fertilisation treatment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Artificial insemination treatment is provided on an outpatient basis. We do not collect information centrally on the number of beds available for invitro fertilisation treatment. It would be unusual for a hospital department to allocate beds exclusively to this one treatment.

Artificial Insemination

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list all establishments within the United Kingdom which store frozen human spermatozoa; and for what purpose it is stored at each establishment;

(2) if he will list all establishments within the United Kingdom which store frozen living human embryos, how many are stored at each establishment, and for what purpose they are stored;

(3) if he will list all those National Health Service establishments which have plans to provide, but do not yet provide (a) artificial insemination services and (b) invitro fertilisation services;

(4) what were the numbers of (a) spontaneous abortions and (b) induced abortions which have been experienced by women undergoing fertilisation by artificial insemination by (i) husband and (ii) donor in each of the institutions where such techniques have been available under the National Health Service in each of the years since they commenced operation;

(5) if he will list the total expenditure upon artifical insemination treatments under the National Health Service in each of the years since such treatment was introduced; and what percentage of the total National Health Service budget this figure represents in each of those years;

(6) how many doctors are directly involved in the practice of artificial insemination within the National Health Service; and at which of the establishments offering such services they are based;

(7) for each of the establishments, whether National Health Service or private, which use invitro fertilisation techniques *(a)* from how many women ova have been extracted, *(b)* how many ova have been successfully fertilised in vitro, *(c)* how many fertilised ova were re-implanted in the womb of the woman from whom they were taken, *(d)* how many of the resulting pregnancies developed to full term, *(e)* how many of those pregnancies which went to full term resulted in stillbirths, *(f)* how many of those pregnancies which went to full term resulted in the birth of a handicapped child and *(g)* how many of those pregnancies which did not go to full term were terminated through (i) spontaneous abortion and (ii) induced abortion;

(8) how many doctors are currently involved in the provision of invitro fertilisation services within the National Health Service at each of the establishments where such techniques are used;

(9) what is the estimated total cost to the National Health Service of the birth of one child whose mother was made pregnant as a result of the use of invitro fertilisation techniques;

(10) in how many of the cases of births resulting from the use of in vitro fertilisation techniques the husband of the child's mother was the child's biological father;

(11) how many of those women who have achieved pregnancy by the use of artificial insemination techniques in each of the years since such techniques were first available already had children;

(12) how many of those women who have achieved pregnancy by the use of in vitro fertilisation techniques in each of the years since such techniques were first available already had children.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this detailed information centrally.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what provision is made for any conscientious objection of National Health Service staff, both medical and non-medical, to being involved in fertilisation of women by artificial insemination;

(2) what provision is made for any conscientious objection of National Health Service staff, either medical or non-medical, to being involved in invitro fertilisation techniques.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There is no statutory provision, but I am sure that health authorities will respond positively to any requests by staff not to be involved in the care of patients undergoing these forms of treatment.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those establishments in the United Kingdom where artificial insemination either by donor or by husband is currently carried out; and how many successful pregnancies have been achieved at each of these centres since they commenced operation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not hold this information centrally. I understand the inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology was told that there are about 35 places in the United Kingdom where an AID service is available.

Warnock Report

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those organisations which have made representations to him concerning the recommendations of the Warnock report since its publication.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The following organisations have made representations to date:

Leeds Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign
The Family Law Bar Association
Guild of Catholic Doctors Joint Ethico-Medical Committee
British Association of Social Workers
National Association of Family Planning Nurses
Health Visitors' Association
Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility
British Society for Developmental Biology
Campaign for Homosexual Equality Tyneside
The Chief Rabbi
The Royal Society
Newcastle Community Health Council
The Law Society
British Medical Association
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Bourn Hall Clinic
Cromwell Hospital
The Patients Association
Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre
Catholic Women's League
University Grants Committee
The Maternity Alliance
Somerset Community Health Council
Feminist International Network on the New Reproductive Technologies
Harrow Child and Family Protection Group
The National Council of Women of Great Britain
Hospital Chaplaincies Council
Institute of Population Studies, Exeter University
Sheffield City Polytechnic
Sunderland Community Health Council
Soroptomist International of St Albans District
The Salvation Army
Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal College of Surgeons of England
Medical Women's Federation
Trent Regional Health Authority
Northern Regional Health Authority
Association of County Councils
Catholic Child Welfare Society
Agricultural and Food Research Council
Women and Children's Welfare Fund
Royal College of Pathologists
Order of Christian Unity
National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education
The Magistrates Association
National Consumer Council
Committee of Directors of Polytechnics
Polytechnic of the South Bank (personal)
The Association of County Court and District Registrars
The Family Planning Association
Council on Tribunals
National Association for the Childless
British Pregnancy Advisory Service
University of Leicester
Chancery Bar Association
Wessex Regional Health Authority
Church of England Board for Social Responsibility
Bristol Family Life Association
Cambridge University Embryo and Gamete Research Group
Wigan Health Authority (personal)
Community Medicine Consultative Committee
Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Oxford Regional Health Authority
United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Joint Consultants Committee
East Anglian Regional Health Authority
Women in the Community (National Federation of Women's Institutes)
The National Association of Women's Clubs
Kidderminster General Hospital
St Mary's Cathedral Roman Catholic Deanery (Newcastle)
The Responsible Society
MRC Experimental Embryology and Teratology Unit (personal)
Manchester University
The British Toxicology Society
Sheffield University
The Eugenics Society
Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
The Presbyterial Council of Ross
Catholic Bishops' Joint Committee on Bio-Ethical Issues
National Board of Catholic Women
National Association for Maternal and Child Welfare
League of Jewish Women
Oxford University Women's Studies Committee
The National Club
The National Association of Health Authorities in England and Wales
The Free Church Federal Council
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering
Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom
The Linacre Centre
University of Bradford School of Applied Social Studies (personal)
LIFE
The Association of Lawyers for the Defence of the Unborn
Ecology Party
Christian Action Research Education Trust
National Association for Counselling Adoptees and their Parents
Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education (personal)
Medical Research Council
Barnsley Women and Health Group
Newcastle upon Tyne Women in Medicine
North West Thames Regional Health Authority
The Birmingham Maternity Hospital (personal)
The Royal College of Midwives
North East Thames Regional Health Authority
The Association of Nurse Administrators
British Medical Association Scottish Office
Association of Directors of Social Work
Scottish Child and Family Alliance
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow
Midlothian Health Council
The Mothers' Union
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's Special Health Authority
Coventry Health Authority
National Association of Family Planning Doctors
The Royal College of General Practitioners
British Paediatric Association

British Humanist Association
The UK Islamic Mission
Women's National Commission
The Association of Child Psychotherapists
Christian Medical Fellowship
The Children's Legal Centre
Luton and District Council for Voluntary Service
The Presbytery of Ross
South East Thames Regional Health Authority
East Lothian Health Council
Dr Barnardo's
Royal College of Nursing and National Council of Nurses of the United Kingdom

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the total cost of the Warnock committee of inquiry and of the publication of its report.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The estimated cost of the inquiry is £194,000. the costs of publishing its report were borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which will recover them through sales.

Retirement Pension

Sir Peter Emery asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will specify the circumstances in which a person who has lived abroad for over 20 years and who during that time has paid no national insurance contributions is eligible to claim and have paid to him abroad a United Kingdom state retirement pension.

Mr. Whitney: Payment of retirement pension is dependent upon satisfaction of the relevant contribution conditions. A person who has lived abroad for over 20 years, and who during that time paid no national insurance contributions, may be entitled to a reduced basic retirement pension provided he paid, or was credited with, a sufficient number of contributions during the remainder of his working life. United Kingdom retirement pensions are payable to persons living abroad but annual increases are payable only to persons living in a European Community country or in a country with whom there is a reciprocal agreement which provides for benefit increases.

InVitro Fertilisation

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the total numbers of children born as a result of invitro fertilisation in other countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We understand that some 400 children have been born in other countries as a result of invitro fertilisation.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all those establishments within the United Kingdom where invitro fertilisation techniques are used in the treatment of infertile couples, specifying which are National Health Service establishments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) at columns *465-466*. We do not collect information about private sector facilities for this treatment, but I understand that at least two centres offer it — Bourn Hall clinic, Cambridgeshire and the Cromwell hospital, London.

Private Prescriptions

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether general practitioners are to be allowed to charge a fee when National Health Service patients request private prescriptions for medications in the eight groups of drugs not listed as available for prescribing on Form E.C.10; and what will be the range of charges permitted to be added to the costs of medications by pharmacists supplying these medications listed on such private prescriptions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are still considering these matters and consulting with the professions about them.

Constipation

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has received during the consultation period to date to widen the limited list in respect of medicines for the relief of constipation, especially among the elderly and young children; and what response he has made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received a number of comments about the laxatives that would remain available on NHS prescription under our limited list proposals, including some which cite the needs of the elderly and young children. We are carefully considering all these views.

West Midlands RHA (District Managers)

Mr. Golding asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when district managers in the West Midlands regional health authority will be appointed; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: District general manager appointments will be made in the west midlands when the health authorities concerned have completed the necessary preparatory work in line with the national arrangements.

NHS (Commercial Service Contracts)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the savings of £6 million attributed to 34 recently let commercial service contracts in the National Health Service takes into account additional costs attributable to redundancy payments and the compensation element of superannuation costs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have advised health authorities to take into account the cost to them of redundancy and other severance payments in assessing the savings that can be made by using private contractors, and we would expect these payments to have been taken into account in the savings authorities have reported.

Benefits

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total amount of benefit claimed by, and in respect of, unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds; and how that amount is distributed between the various classes of claim.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Stillbirths

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific investigations he intends to conduct into the cause of stillbirths in women from ethnic minority communities.

Mr. John Patten: We have identified as a priority the funding of research into the causes of perinatal deaths, including stillbirths. At local level we would expect Maternity Services Liaison Committees to see that clinical reviews are carried out on perinatal deaths, so that any special factors that appear to be associated with the stillbirth rate of particular groups of mothers, including those from ethnic minority communities, can be identified.

Vietnamese Refugees

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what initiatives have been taken by his Department during the last five years to make National Health Service facilities more easily accessible to Vietnamese refugees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In 1979-80 health authorities were provided with additional funds specifically to cover the extra direct costs incurred by community health services in those areas where special reception centres were set up. Also, our Department contributed material on the National Health Service to leaflets prepared for the refugees by the Home Office and voluntary organisations. Every effort has been made by the voluntary organisations working with the refugees to ensure that they are taken on the list of a general practitioner as soon as possible.

Hospitals (Repairs)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospitals have had to undertake repairs on leaking roofs during the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Adults (Survey)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines he intends to issue arising from the survey published by his Department on the heights and weights of adults in Great Britain.

Mr. John Patten: The findings of this survey to the effect that many people in Great Britain including young people are overweight, and that heart trouble occurs more frequently among overweight people, highlights the importance of the dietary recommendations made in the recent report on diet and cardiovascular disease by the Chief Medical Officer's committee on medical aspects of food policy (COMA). My right hon. Friend has asked the British Nutrition Foundation and the Health Education Council that their joint advisory committee on nutrition education turn the COMA advice into practical guidelines for the public as soon as possible.

Griffiths Report

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) when he intends to complete implementation of those parts of the Griffiths report which relate to the organisation of his Department; when he intends that the process of identification of general managers at unit level should be completed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will now lay before Parliament the details of recent changes in the internal organisation of his Department, following the Government's response to recommendation No. 6 of the First Report of last Session from the Social Services Committee (HC 209).

Mr. Fowler: Details of initial changes made to the organisation of my Department in the light of the Griffiths report were given in my memorandum of written evidence to the Social Services Committee (published in HC 209). Now that the chairman of the NHS Management Board, Mr. Victor Paige, is in post, I shall be considering with him what further changes are needed. I will then be in a position to inform the House.

Health authorities have been asked to complete the establishment of the general management function at unit level by the end of 1985.

Antenatal Clinics

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how long were the average waiting times for appointments for mothers of ethnic minority groups in antenatal clinics *(a)* in the Greater London area and *(b)* in the west midlands region in comparison with those for mothers of the indigenous population.

Mr. John Patten: Information on this is not collected centrally but I can see no reason why there should be any differentiation between mothers from different ethnic groups when bookings are made for antenatal clinics.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements he intends to make for the provision of more evening antenatal clinic facilities to enable women and mothers with children to attend with their husbands after finishing work.

Mr. John Patten: The Maternity Services Advisory Committee in its first report recommended that health authorities should involve fathers in antenatal care wherever possible, and that an assessment should be made of the need for evening or weekend clinics in order to overcome any problems of access. We have commended the report to health authorities for them to consider what action can and should be taken locally.

St. Thomas' Hospital

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has for expanding the waiting area of the surgical outpatients department of St. Thomas' hospital in London.

Mr. John Patten: West Lambeth health authority is responsible for the management of St. Thomas' hospital. I suggest the hon. Member seek this information from the chairman of the authority.

Education Centres

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines he intends to issue to doctors and nurses sharing education centres in tightly planned hospitals about timetabling arrangements.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A health building note is in course of preparation which will give guidance to health authorities on accommodation for education. We intend to include some guidance on timetabling to ensure that adequate but not extravagant resources are allocated to the education of Health Service staff. The draft document will, however, be the subject of consultation with NHS interests and with medical, nursing and other interested professional and staff bodies.

Doctors' Surgeries

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available for the purpose of improving security arrangements for general practitioners' surgeries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Resources are already available under the improvement grant scheme to doctors wishing to improve the security arrangements at their practice premises. Under this scheme eligible doctors receive by way of grant one-third of the actual cost to them of approved work and related fees, and many doctors have taken advantage of this facility.

Bloomsbury District Health Authority

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what resources he intends to make available to Bloomsbury district health authority for the provision of funded sessions for perinatal pathology.

Mr. John Patten: The allocation of resources to Bloomsbury Health Authority is a matter for North-East Thames regional health authority. The uses to which those resources are put is a matter for those authorities.

Perinatal Pathology

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he intends to take to attract more potential specialists to train in the field of perinatal pathology.

Mr. John Patten: Training for the highly specialised field of perinatal pathology within the discipline of histopathology is provided according to local needs and circumstances. There is no uniform training syllabus formulated by the Royal College of Pathologists, the appropriate independent professional body. The development of services is a matter for health authorities within available resources.

Hospitals (Rooms)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of hospitals within the National Health Service are equipped with two, four and six-bedded rooms.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Hospitals

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action has been taken by his Department during the last five years in respect of National Health Service hospitals considered by the Public Accounts Committee as being constructionally suspect; and if he will specify the hospitals concerned.

Mr. John Patten: During the past five years the PAC has considered structural defects at the following hospitals:

The Hospital for Sick Children: Great Ormond Street
Guys
Monyhull
Goscote
Leighton
Basingstoke
Princess Margaret: Swindon
Southend

In all these cases the Department has approved proposals for remedial work by the regional or special health authorities concerned. It has also agreed their undertaking legal proceedings to recover the costs of this work in appropriate cases.

Hospital Construction Projects

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hospital construction projects undertaken by private contractors have had to be temporarily halted due to strikes and pay claims or to be totally abandoned owing to bankruptcy or liquidation of firms in the past 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: No major hospital construction projects have been totally abandoned in the past ten years because of the bankruptcy or liquidation of private contractors. The number that has been temporarily halted due to strikes and pay claims is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health Authorities (Managers)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many regional health authorities have appointed general managers; how many of the appointees are new to the National Health Service; and what salaries and conditions of service have been fixed for them;

(2) how many district health authorities have appointed general managers; what percentage of appointees are new to the National Health Service; what arrangements exist for determining the salaries and conditions of service of appointees; and if these arrangements will involve Whitley council machinery.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Following is the position in England at 4 January:

	Region	*District*
Number of authorities	14	192
Number of appointments authorised	13	68
Number of appointees new to the NHS	None	6

The interim arrangements for determining remuneration were set out in paragraph 12 of Annex C of our Department's circular HC(84)13, a copy of which was placed in the Library. We have not yet reached any conclusion on long-term arrangements for determining the pay of general managers.

Conditions of service are those determined for National Health Service staff in the discipline from which the general manager is recruited or, in the case of appointees new to the National Health Service, those applicable to administrative and clerical staff. In all cases protection of general manager remuneration in the event of non-renewal of the appointment at the end of the period of tenure is excluded.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether staff expected to undertake additional duties and responsibilities consequent upon the appointment of a general manager will be regraded.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department is overseeing the changes to management structures consequent upon the appointment of general managers at district and regional level.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps will be taken by the regions to discuss with staffs the effects of the appointment of general managers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I would expect that all health authorities will wish to keep their staff fully informed on the effects of management changes but the method of communication chosen is a matter for each authority.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the appointment of general managers by health authorities entails the definition of job descriptions of chief officers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Job descriptions are matters for local health authorities. The appointment of a general manager is bound to cause the existing job description of a chief officer to be amended in some respects.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether health authorities consult the relevant officers before appointing general managers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Private Patients)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services by what criteria he chose the 37 health authorities which were investigated by his Department's auditors regarding the collection of private patient fees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The 10 principal auditors responsible for the audit of the accounts of Health Authorities in England were instructed to arrange for each of their three teams to visit at least one large hospital with potential private patient activity. The final choice was theirs, subject to the concurrence of the Director of Audit.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for his Department's auditors to investigate the collection of private patient fees in districts where this is requested *(a)* by the health authority or *(b)* by any of its members.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The recent exercise conducted by the statutory auditors at the request of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State revealed failure by some health authorities to comply with Departmental circulars and to maintain proper control. A list of the more important failures was appended to a letter I then sent to all health authority chairmen. In this letter all health authorities were required to review their arrangements and to take corrective action where necessary.

The statutory auditors examine, in the course of a prescribed cycle, the financial aspects of all the activities of health authorities and it would not be useful to interfere with this planned programme by placing the resources of the Audit Branch at the disposal of health authorities.

NHS Patients (Private Clinics)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether district health authorities are entitled to enter into contractual arrangements so that National Health Service patients are treated in private clinics by consultants who normally work in the district's own hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes.

NHS (District Management Teams)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in what way the accountability of unit managers to the district general manager alters the responsibilities of members of district management teams in the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The accountability of management including members of district management teams and unit general managers to the general manager who is himself personally accountable to the district health authority is an important element in the new arrangements we are introducing.

Regions (Resource Allocations)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he takes the length of waiting lists into account when determining resource allocations to regions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The length of waiting lists is not in itself an accurate guide to the respective needs of regions.

Hospitals (Statistics)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each year since 1970 the number of National Health Service hospitals in each region.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Statistics)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each special health authority, district health authority, regional health authority and for England as a whole *(a)* the number of authorised pay beds at 31 December 1983, *(b)* the average daily number of beds occupied by private patients during 1983 and *(c)* the number of discharges and deaths of private patients during 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is given in the tables.

Regional and District Health Authority	Number of authorised pay-beds at 31 December 1983	Average daily number of beds occupied by private patients during 1983*	Discharges and deaths of private patients during 1983*
Northern RHA			
RHA Total	103	28·4	2,382
Hartlepool	6	0·9	85
North Tees	7	1·1	83
South Tees	15	3·6	368
East Cumbria	10	2·8	281
South Cumbria	7	3·7	254
West Cumbria	4	1·1	85
Darlington	7	1·6	113
Durham	4	0·4	28
North West Durham	5	0·5	44
South West Durham	3	0·6	37
Northumberland	8	0·9	53
Gateshead	3	0·2	24
Newcastle	9	6·6	476
North Tyneside	2	0·7	39
South Tyneside	4	0·9	65
Sunderland	9	2·8	347
Yorkshire RHA			
RHA Total	199	75·5	4,462
Hull	12	1·5	109
East Yorkshire	10	2·6	252
Grimsby	7	2·4	235
Scunthorpe	9	2·7	199
Northallerton	7	1·4	78
York	5	2·2	116
Scarborough	6	0·7	44
Harrogate	8	3·9	183
Bradford	34	3·2	244
Airedale	12	6·5	409
Calderdale	24	12·4	746
Huddersfield	10	4·4	187
Dewsbury	6	1·4	71
Leeds Western	29	21·0	950
Leeds Eastern	6	3·2	133
Wakefield	10	4·6	410
Pontefract	4	1·4	96
Trent RHA			
RHA Total	143	51·5	3,976
North Derbyshire	7	1·9	147
South Derbyshire	15	5·4	448
Leicestershire	23	8·8	747
North Lincolnshire	18	5·8	114
South Lincolnshire	11	6·2	428
Bassetlaw	6	1·6	164
Central Nottinghamshire	15	4·7	374
Nottingham	30	10·9	1,033
Barnsley	5	1·6	140
Doncaster	3	0·5	73
Rotherham	Nil	Nil	Nil
Sheffield	10	4·1	308
East Anglian RHA			
RHA Total	106	54·9	3,617
Cambridge	11	8·4	366
Peterborough	18	1·5	115
West Suffolk	10	5·4	287
East Suffolk	24	12·8	619
Norwich	28	19·7	1,618
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	5	2·2	226
West Norfolk and Wisbech	6	3·4	295
Huntingdon	4	1·5	91
North West Thames RHA			
RHA total	292	137·8	8,891
North Bedfordshire	12	4·4	328
South Bedfordshire	9	2·4	307
North Hertfordshire	10	1·6	146
East Hertfordshire	10	3·5	336
North West Hertfordshire	15	7·0	518
South West Hertfordshire	6	0·4	143

Regional and District Health Authority	Number of authorised pay-beds at 31 December 1983	Average daily number of beds occupied by private patients during 1983*	Discharges and deaths of private patients during 1983*
Barnet	12	4·4	306
Harrow	13	1·9	70
Hillingdon	32	13·9	1,054
Hounslow and Spelthorne	7	3·6	364
Ealing	3	0·1	12
Brent	10	2·0	96
Paddington	65	38·5	2,348
Hammersmith and Fulham	30	22·6	1,179
Victoria	58	31·5	1,684
North East Thames RHA			
RHA total	404	186·0	11,170
Basildon and Thurrock	11	4·6	375
Mid Essex	20	10·8	1,266
North East Essex	9	3·2	286
West Essex	15	8·0	690
Southend	19	5·4	507
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	13	6·6	516
Hampstead	29	26·1	961
Bloomsbury	178	81·3	4,570
Islington	31	2·7	207
City and Hackney	15	9·1	198
Newham	2	†	11
Tower Hamlets	34	16·9	968
Enfield	3	1·8	128
Haringey	10	1·4	88
Redbridge	8	4·2	219
Waltham Forest	7	3·9	180
South East Thames RHA			
RHA total	337	144·5	9,090
Brighton	24	9·9	635
Eastbourne	4	1·4	99
Hastings	6	2·8	262
South East Kent	12	1·5	119
Canterbury and Thanet	29	2·2	217
Dartford and Gravesham	8	1·3	124
Maidstone	7	1·4	100
Medway	8	1·4	109
Tunbridge Wells	39	19·0	1,529
Bexley	10	4·5	288
Greenwich	14	5·4	355
Bromley	24	6·8	462
West Lambeth	38	27·6	1,283
Camberwell	45	28·1	1,444
Lewisham and North Southwark	69	31·2	2,064
South West Thames RHA			
RHA total	182	81·2	5,638
North West Surrey	3	7·5	599
West Surrey and North East Hants	11	6·0	740
South West Surrey	5	2·3	151
Mid Surrey	20	10·2	775
East Surrey	23	14·6	840
Chichester	6	3·1	199
Mid Downs	25	11·5	839
Worthing	6	1·3	80
Croydon	12	2·8	317
Kingston and Esher	8	4·5	251
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	12	1·9	93
Wandsworth	20	7·5	298
Merton and Sutton	21	8·0	456
Wessex RHA			
RHA total	120	57·3	4,395
East Dorset	14	4·1	264
West Dorset	13	0·8	57
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	16	11·3	1,184
Southampton and South West Hampshire	16	9·3	457
Winchester	11	3·1	224
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	11	12·2	791
Salisbury	10	1·7	74
Swindon	12	8·8	866

Regional and District Health Authority	*Number of authorised pay-beds at 31 December 1983*	*Average daily number of beds occupied by private patients during 1983**	*Discharges and deaths of private patients during 1983**
Bath	11	2·0	91
Isle of Wight	6	4·0	387
Oxford RHA			
RHA Total	180	81·0	5,927
East Berkshire	17	3·2	251
West Berkshire	26	15·5	1,800
Aylesbury	32	19·3	729
Wycombe	24	9·8	916
Milton Keynes	Nil	Nil	Nil
Kettering	11	7·1	642
Northampton	13	6·6	570
Oxfordshire	57	19·5	1,019
South Western RHA			
RHA Total	104	52·7	3,038
Bristol and Weston	6	6·2	263
Frenchay	6	3·0	145
Southmead	2	†	18
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	13	9·6	212
Exeter	10	1·5	87
North Devon	5	1·7	148
Plymouth	8	2·7	266
Tobay	9	3·3	251
Cheltenham	14	9·8	644
Gloucester	18	7·5	555
Somerset	13	7·4	449
West Midlands RHA			
RHA Total	267	81·9	6,015
Bromsgrove and Redditch	6	0·8	69
Herefordshire	4	1·1	76
Kidderminster and District	6	1·3	119
Worcester and District	20	6·7	629
Shropshire	14	5·6	284
Mid Staffordshire	8	4·5	302
North Staffordshire	16	4·2	431
South East Staffordshire	10	3·6	364
Rugby	7	3·0	271
North Warwickshire	3	1·3	179
South Warwickshire	13	5·3	275
Central Birmingham	67	15·7	957
East Birmingham	3	1·2	80
North Birmingham	9	5·2	315
South Birmingham	21	4·1	171
West Birmingham	10	1·9	262
Coventry	10	4·9	328
Dudley	10	1·6	114
Sandwell	8	2·2	167
Solihull	4	1·3	92
Walsall	11	5·6	473
Wolverhampton	7	0·8	57
Mersey RHA			
RHA Total	123	44·4	2,651
Chester	8	1·2	77
Crewe	16	8·8	685
Halton	Nil	Nil	Nil
Macclesfield	15	1·9	120
Warrington	15	10·1	526
Liverpool	20	8·3	431
St Helens and Knowsley	15	3·8	207
North Sefton	7	3·3	209
South Sefton	10	2·3	156
Wirral	17	4·7	240
North Western RHA			
RHA Total	244	84·2	5,946
Lancaster	13	7·5	521
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	15	3·1	196
Preston	12	2·6	155
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	9	1·2	62
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	8	3·6	299
West Lancashire	15	6·5	209

Regional and District Health Authority	*Number of authorised pay-beds at 31 December 1983*	*Average daily number of beds occupied by private patients during 1983**	*Discharges and deaths of private patients during 1983**
Chorley and South Ribble	4	0·1	4
Bolton	20	6·2	405
Bury	15	6·4	491
North Manchester	9	3·5	82
Central Manchester	43	17·2	1,718
South Manchester	33	14·9	1,009
Oldham	5	2·5	182
Rochdale	2	0·2	18
Salford	11	1·2	99
Stockport	5	0·7	94
Tameside and Glossop	2	0·4	36
Trafford	7	1·5	87
Wigan	16	4·9	279
Hospital			
Total	183	102·6	5,740
The Hospitals for Sick Children	34	22·5	956
The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	18	9·6	298
Moorfields Eye Hospital	22	10·8	1,284
The Bethlem Royal Hospital and The Maudsley Hospital	6	1·1	40
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	38	21·1	982
The Royal Marsden Hospital	27	17·0	1,002
Hammersmith Hospital	18	11·0	441
Queen Charlotte's Hospital for Women	20	9·5	737
The Eastman Dental Hospital	Nil	Nil	Nil
ENGLAND TOTAL	2,987	1,263·9	82,938

* Provisional figures.
† Less than 0·1.

Residential Institutions (Inmates)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information is available to him on the number of people who live, on a permanent basis, during the week in a hospital or other form of residential institution but who return to their family home at weekends.

Mr. John Patten: While we have some information on long-stay patients in hospitals and permanent residents in other statutory, voluntary or private residential institutions, we have no central information on how many return to family homes at weekends.

Medical Product (Safety)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will refer a product, the name of which has been supplied to him, to the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Back Pain Association (Exhibition)

Mr. Jessel asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to the Back Pain Associaton to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to the held in the Upper Waiting Hall on 14 January.

Prescription (Costs)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the average cost per item dispensed to prescriptions made out by general practitioners under the National Health Service in each year since 1975 at constant prices and the average cost of each such prescription, also at constant prices.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The average net ingredient cost per prescription item dispensed by retail pharmacists and appliance contractors in England in each year since 1975, at constant (1975) prices was as follows:

Year	£
1975	0·94
1976	1·01
1977	1·09
1978	1·15
1979	1·17
1980	1·21
1981	1·27
1982	1·32
1983	1·39

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many family practioner committees in England have a comprehensive computerised age/sex register;

(2) how many family practitioner committees in England are expected to have a comprehensive computerised age/sex register by the end of 1985-86.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Fifteen family practioners committees now have operational computerised patient registers. By the end of 1985-86, on present plans, the total will be 31.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied with the use family practitioner committees and district health authorities have made of cervical cancer recall records passed on to them when the Southport scheme ended.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The national recall system operated by the NHS central registry at Southport proved ineffective. After consultation with health authorities this scheme was phased out. The cytology forms which were held centrally by the Registry until 1981 were sent to health authorities to be used as the basis of their own local recall arrangements. We have recently reminded health authorities of their responsibilities for ensuring that symptomless women in the priority groups who have at any time presented for a smear test are recalled at five yearly intervals.

Doctors' Surgeries

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of burglaries into general practitioners' surgeries have arisen during the past 12 months; and what quantities of drugs and prescription pads went missing as a result.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available separately.

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children have been damaged by whooping cough vaccine in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 November 1984, c. *625*]: It is not possible to say how many children have suffered such damage. Data on damage by whooping cough vaccine are analysed in the document, "Whooping Cough", published in 1981 by HMSO, which contains reports by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. It includes the results of a special study which concluded that

". . . it seems likely that permanent damage as a result of pertussis immunisation is a very rare event and the attribution of a cause in individual cases is precarious".

We have no grounds for believing that there has been any change in this position.

ENT Consultants

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the waiting time for *(a)* outpatient appointments and *(b)* operations in the ear, nose and throat specialties in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) England and (iii) each of the English health authorities.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 December 1984, c. *474*]: Information on out-patient waiting times is not available centrally. The estimated median interval between the date a patient was put on the in-patient waiting list and the date of admission to a NHS hospital in each of the English regional health authorities and the four United Kingdom countries is given in the table. An aggregated figure covering the whole of the United Kingdom is not available.

Estimated median waiting time (in weeks) for ear, nose and throat operations in NHS hospitals in 1982

	Number of weeks
Scotland	8
Wales	10
Northern Ireland	*9
England	11
English regional health authorities:	
Northern	11
Yorkshire	13
Trent	12
East Anglian	12
North West Thames	9
North East Thames	9
South East Thames	9
South West Thames	11
Wessex	16
Oxford	10
South Western	13
West Midlands	12
Mersey	10
North Western	10
Special health authorities and boards of governors	7

* Figure for 1983.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of pensioners with gross incomes (a) over £20,000, (b) between £10,000 and £20,000, (c) between £5,000 and £10,000 and (d) receiving supplementary benefit; and if he will break down each figure into the following categories (i) lone pensioners, (ii) married couples and (iii) any other types of family unit.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to the reply*, 17 December, c. *46-7*]: Based on an analysis of the incomes of people over pensionable age recorded in the 1981 family expenditure survey and deflating the respective gross income levels to 1981 equivalent values, it is estimated that the distribution of the gross incomes of pensioner family units is as shown in the table.

Family Type—Head Over Pension Age

Gross Income pa at Nov 1984 value	*married couples*		*single persons*		*all pensioner families*	
	No Thousands*	*per cent.*	*No* Thousands*	*per cent.*	*No* Thousands*	*per cent.*
Under £5,000						
a. receiving supplementary benefit†	300	13	1,440	34	1,740	27
b. all families over pension age (including those with supplementary benefit at a)	1,500	65	3,950	93	5,400	83
£5,000 but under £10,000	600	26	250	6	850	13
£10,000 but under £20,000	200	9	‡	1	250	4
£20,000 and over	‡	—	—	—	‡	—
Total*	2,300	100	4,250	100	6,550	100

Notes:

* FES based estimated are rounded to the nearest 50,000; totals may therefore not sum.

† Source: supplementary benefits annual enquiry 1981.

‡ Less than 50,000.

Visually Handicapped People

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any further plans to protect the visually handicapped when the provisions of the Health and Social Security Act 1984 are fully implemented.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *420*]: We will continue to give help towards the cost of spectacles supplied under the general opthalmic service (GOS) based upon financial need.

We propose to identify certain of the more powerful or complex lenses currently supplied under the GOS. All patients needing such lenses will be given the option of continuing to have them supplied by the GOS. The charge to the patient will reflect the cost of the lenses and their dispensing. As at present people on low income will get them free or have part of the charge remitted.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 10 January 1985

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

AIDS (Research)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the research projects on acquired immune deficiency syndrome that the Government are supporting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid through the Department, is at present supporting the following research programmes on AIDS through its project grants scheme:

(a) Professor M. W. Adler and Dr. R. S. Tedder (Middlesex hospital medical school, London): An investigation into the immunology and aetiology of AIDS;

(b) Dr. J. Craske (PHLS, Withington hospital, Manchester): An epidemiological study of the relationship of AIDS in patients with disorders of blood coagulation to its possible acquisition through treatment with blood products;

(c) Dr. D. J. Jeffries (St. Mary's hospital medical school, London) and Dr. D. Taylor Robinson, (clinical research centre, Harrow): Virological investigations of patients with AIDS;

(d) Dr. A. Pinching (St. Mary's hospital medical school, London): A study on the killing of intracellular pathogens by macrophages derived from homosexual males with AIDS and related disorders;

(e) Professor R. Weiss (Institute of cancer research, London): Retroviruses associated with AIDS.

I would also refer the hon. Member to my replies on this subject on 26 November 1984 at column 389, and on 11 December at columns 451-52.

Foetal Tissue

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all those research establishments in the United Kingdom which are supplied with foetal tissue from the foetal tissue bank at the Royal Marsden hospital; and what safeguards exist to ensure that such material does not go beyond the shores of the United Kingdom

Mr. Brooke: I understand from the Medical Research Council, which funds the foetal tissue bank at the Royal Marsden hospital, that in 1984 the following establishments received foetal material from the bank:

Brompton hospital, London
Central public health virus laboratory, Colindale
Central public health laboratory, Middlesex
Charing Cross hospital, London
Guy's hospital, London
Hammersmith hospital, London
Harefield hospital, Uxbridge
Imperial cancer research fund, London
King's college hospital, London
London school of hygiene and tropical medicine, London
Ludwig institute, Royal Marsden hospital, Sutton
MRC clinical research centre, London
MRC human biochemical genetics unit, London
National hospital, London
Royal Marsden hospital, London
Royal postgraduate medical school, London
St. Bartholomew's hospital, London
St. George's hospital, London
St. Mary's hospital, London
St. Thomas's hospital, London
University college hospital and medical school, London
Department of pathology, university of Cambridge
Westminster hospital medical school, London

All material from this foetal tissue bank is issued only to researchers in the United Kingdom, who have first obtained written clearance from their local ethical committee. I understand that the MRC regards this as sufficient safeguard against such material being exported.

Science Budget

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the distribution of the science budget for 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: Having considered the recommendations of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, I have decided that the science budget for 1985-86 should, subject to approval by Parliament of the Estimates in due course, be allocated as follows:

1985-86	*£ million cash*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	50·3
Medical Research Council	122·3
Natural Environment Research Council	67·3
Science and Engineering Research Council	298·0
Economic and Social Research Council	23·6
British Museum (Natural History)*	16·2
Royal Society	5·9
Fellowship of Engineering	0·25
	583·9

* Including expenditure of £4·8 million by PSA on behalf of the museum.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the implications for capital expenditure on schools and further education of the recent allocations to local education authorities for prescribed capital expenditure and for capital projects at voluntary aided and special agreement schools in 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: The total available for 1985-86 in respect of county and voluntary schools and of local authority further and higher education is £355 million. This should permit continuing progress with the removal of surplus school places. Within further and higher education, it provides for a start to be made on all those new projects of which local authorities were provisionally informed last autumn, and for all bids made by authorities for expenditure on equipment related to teaching and research to be met in full.

I have retained a small reserve, largely against the possibility of any local education authority being able to demonstrate that the reduction of the prescribed proportion of capital receipts will make it impossible to fulfil contractual or statutory obligations. Authorities have been informed of their share of the total, and a list of the allocations has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

Hull

Q40. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Prime Minister when she next intends to pay an official visit to Hull.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

North Sea Oil Revenue

Q66. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Prime Minister what will replace revenue currently derived from North sea oil production when the level of production has decreased significantly; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The North sea tax revenues are being put to good use. Inflation has been reduced to the lowest level since the 1960s and the level of Government borrowing relative to GDP is one of the lowest anywhere in the world. A considerable part of the public sector's overseas debts have been repaid and overseas assets are being built up. Domestic fixed investment is expected to have reached record levels in 1984.

This will place the public sector finances and the economy itself in a good position to withstand falling oil revenues when oil production eventually begins to decline. The non-North sea economy and overseas earnings will tend to generate additional revenues as oil production declines. The Green Paper on "Public Expenditure and Taxation into the 1990s" (Cmnd. 9189) showed that, with restraint in public expenditure, falling debt interest costs should allow both non-North sea taxes and the level of borrowing (relative to GDP) to be reduced despite declining oil revenues.

Supplementary Benefit

Q69. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister how many people were in receipt of supplementary benefit on 1 January; and how many of those in receipt had children.

The Prime Minister: At December 1983, the latest date for which information is available, 4·3 million, of whom 965,000 had dependent children.

Sunday Trading

Q78. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she will issue guidance to local authorities concerning the prosecution of shops which contravene the law relating to Sunday opening.

The Prime Minister: No. The law is clear and local authorities do not require guidance.

Government Boarding Allowances

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister if she will estimate the saving which could be made if the rules of parental contribution applicable to university students were applied to parents given a Government boarding allowance.

The Prime Minister: The necessary information on parental income is not available since, as I explained to the hon. Member on 14 December, at column 606, this is not a factor in determining boarding allowances for the children of public servants.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister if she will publish figures broken down by Department for the cost of Government boarding allowance schemes for public servants in 1983-84; and if she will set out the circumstances for each scheme in which allowances are paid.

The Prime Minister: The figures requested for 1983-84 are as follows:

	£ million
Armed Forces	76·5
Diplomatic Service	5·9
British Council	1·2
Overseas Development Administration	0·7
Ministry of Defence (Civilians)	0·5
Other Departments	0·2
Total	85·0

The total differs slightly from that given in my reply to the hon. Member on 14 December at column 606, because that reply covered only the Ministry of Defence and the Diplomatic Service.

Engagements

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 10 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will be having further meetings later today.

Peking

Mr. Adley asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent visit to Peking.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 9 January, at column 441.

TRANSPORT

Pelican Crossings

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the time allowed for pedestrians to cross at pelican crossings.

Mrs. Chalker: Currently recommended times are set down in departmental standard TD/4/79. A copy is in the Library.

Two changes to the recommended timings for use in certain circumstances are under consideration which will benefit pedestrians. One is to keep the red signal showing to traffic for two seconds after the green walking man has started to flash, rather than as at present when the flashing amber signal showing to traffic starts immediately the green walking man starts to flash. The other is to increase by two seconds the duration of the period when the green walking man is shown steadily illuminated.

Roads

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his Department's policy to ensure that when improvements to trunk roads or the building of

bypasses on trunk roads severs main routes between villages that these routes should have bridges or underpasses built to maintain the link.

Mr. Ridley: Bridges or underpasses are provided where necessary. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, perhaps she would write to me.

Bypasses

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport what factors, apart from cost, are taken into account when assessing different schemes for building bypasses on trunk roads; and how these different factors are weighted.

Mr. Ridley: The variety of non-financial factors included in the assessment of trunk road schemes are set out in the Department of Transport's "Manual of Environmental Appraisal", published in September 1983, copies of which are in the Library of the House. No attempt is made to attribute particular weights to these factors as the circumstances of each case vary considerably and non-financial factors are not in general capable of being assessed under a common weighting system.

A420 (Kingston Bagpuize)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Transport what were his reasons for implementing a trunking order on the A420 around Kingston Bagpuize.

Mr. Ridley: As I explained in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), on 17 December at column 69, we propose that the A420 between Swindon and Oxford should become a trunk road because it is part of an important route between Swindon and the midlands.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Barriers

23. **Mr. John David Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if legal barriers to trade exist between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which do not apply to trade between the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: No.

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce a specific customs classification for dead human foetal material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: I can see no reason for doing so.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Interviews (Tape Recording)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the recent tape recording trials of police interviews in Leicester.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The tape recording of police interviews has been in operation at Leicester central police station since 2 April 1984. Five interview rooms are equipped for tape recording: three of them in the main cell block; one in the CID suite; and one in the regional crime squad suite. Up to 31 December 1984, 3,378 persons had been interviewed on tape. The chief constable tells me that the officers who have participated in the trial have adapted well to the new procedures. Although it is too early to point with certainly to changes which have been brought about by tape recording, there is some evidence of an increase in the number of pleas of guilty and of less frequent challenge to police officers' evidence of interviews. Detailed monitoring of the trial in Leicester and in the five other tape recording trial areas is being undertaken by the Home Office research and planning unit in order to establish the full effects which tape recording gives rise to in the criminal justice system, and to inform the planning for the implementation of a national scheme. Home Office "Research Study No. 82", which reported the full background to the trials and some preliminary results, was published last month.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received since the publication of the Auld report; of these how many were in favour of revised shopping hours and how many against; and if he will list those from business and trade organisations.

Mr. Mellor: Following publication of the report of the Auld committee we have received 172 letters commenting on the recommendations. Of these 33 have been in favour of revised shopping hours and 139 against. The following business and trade organisations have written:

British Hardware Federation
Horticultural Trades Association
National Chamber of Trade
Pharamaceutical Society of Great Britain
Voluntary Group Association

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984

Mr. Hayward asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to issue codes of practice under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Mr. Brittan: Section 66 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 requires the Home Secretary to issue codes of practice in connection with the exercise of statutory powers of stop and search; the detention, treatment, questioning and identification of persons by police officers; searches of premises by police officers; and the seizure of property found by police officers on persons or premises. Drafts of all these codes have already been published for public comment.

I have today published revised versions of these codes. Comments will, as before, be welcome, and should be sent to Room 530, Home Office by 8 February. In accordance with section 67 of the Act I shall consider carefully all representations made about the drafts; and after deciding what modifications are appropriate I shall seek Parliament's approval for their issue, to come into force on 1 January 1986.

Copies of the drafts have been placed in the Library of each House and sent to the wide range of interested bodies and individuals who have received earlier drafts. Additional copies are available on request, free of charge, from Room 531, Home Office.

ENERGY

China (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Energy what exhibitions in which British companies participating in China were visited by the Minister of State, Department of Energy in his recent visit at the end of November.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: During my visit to China, from 1 to 7 December 1984, I opened the United Kingdom offshore oil and gas seminar in Beijing (Peking) and also participated in the seminar in Guangzhou (Canton).

The seminar, held in three centres (Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai), was organised jointly by the Offshore Supplies Office of the Department of Energy and the Sino-British Trade Council, and has been judged a highly successful event. It was technical in character and involved the following companies:

Atlantic Drilling Company Ltd. (exploration drilling)
BP Exploration Ltd.
Matthew Hall plc (project management)
Humphreys and Glasgow Ltd. (engineering design)
John Brown Engineers and Constructors Ltd. (engineering design)
Rolls Royce Ltd. (power generation)
Cleveland Redpath Offshore Ltd. (fabrication)
Balfour Kilpatrick Ltd. (hook-up and commissioning)
British Underwater Engineering Ltd.

Wave Energy

Mr. William Ross asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show *(a)* the most optimistic, *(b)* the most pessimistic and *(c)* the mean projected costs of electricity generation available to him for each design structure or device for obtaining energy from waves.

Mr. David Hunt: The Department's energy technology support unit is preparing a comprehensive report on wave energy which will include this information. On publication a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate Report (Heysham)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what action he is taking as a result of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate report, requested by the Sizewell B public inquiry, revealing weaknesses in procedure, ergonomics and human performance, following the incident at Heysham in June 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Both the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Central Electricity Generating Board have given evidence on this incident at the Sizewell public inquiry. The CEGB has accepted fully the recommendations for improved practices in appropriate areas as outlined in a special internal inquiry. The incident was also investigated by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and it has concluded that the measures being taken by the CEGB are satisfactory. It will continue to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of these measures.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal has been produced since 1 December; what is the cumulative figure since the coal mining dispute began; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest published figures show that 44·8 million tonnes of deep-mined coal were produced between the start of the NUM overtime ban in November 1983 and the end of October 1984.

Fusion Programme

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's fusion programme.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department has recently completed a review of the United Kingdom's fusion programme. This research forms an integral part of the Euratom fusion programme, a successful example of European co-operation in the high technology sector, to which the United Kingdom makes a major financial and scientific contribution.

My right hon. Friend has decided that the Government's direct contribution to the UKAEA's fusion work, which is carried out under a contract of association with Euratom, should be £15·9 million in 1985-86, £13·7 million in 1986-87 and £13·3 million in 1987-88.

This funding, along with our commitments to the Joint European Torus project under the joint understanding and the host agreement, will ensure that the United Kingdom maintains a substantial fusion programme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Argentina

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Swiss Government have expressed any concern to Her Majesty's Government about continuing to act as a guardian of British interests in Argentina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: No.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the purposes for which DDT was approved for use by farmers in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1975 and *(c)* 1980; and what was the known use by weight and area of DDT-based products in each of these years.

Mrs. Fenner: DDT was cleared under the pesticides safety precautions scheme for the following uses in 1970, 1975 and 1980:

1970

1. Home garden (Use withdrawn 1971).
2. Home kitchen and larder (Use withdrawn 1971).
3. Rodenticide.
4. Agriculture and horticulture: On any non-edible crop. On any growing edible crop subject to specified harvest intervals.
5. Food storage.
6. Animal husbandry (use withdrawn 1972).

1975

1. Rodenticide (use withdrawn 1980).

2. Agriculture and horticulture: On any non-edible crop. On any growing edible crop subject to specified harvest intervals, with the exception of:

(a) permanent and temporary grass for grazing, silage or hay (use on new leys was acceptable where necessary);
(b) brassica seed crops, peas and beans (but allowable for weevil control of seedling crops);
(c) top fruit, raspberries, gooseberries, loganberries, blackberries and redcurrants;
(d) the control of aphids on any crop.

1980

Agriculture and horticulture (as above).

These uses were withdrawn as alternative pesticides became available. The last cleared use, that is to control eelworms in ornamentals, sugar beet, potatoes, strawberries and carrots, was withdrawn from 1 October 1984.

The approximate weights of DDT used were as follows:

1970—210 tonnes
1975—90 tonnes
1980—100 tonnes

I regret that information on areas treated is not available at reasonable cost.

Conservation

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in pursuance of his responsibilities under section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968, he is prepared to reject a claim for grant-aid under the agriculture and horticultural grant schemes relating to an investment which has seriously damaged the countryside or its flora and fauna *(a)* within a site of special scientific interest, national park or area of outstanding natural beauty and *(b)* in the wider countryside; and what specific advice his officials offer farmers and landowners so as to avoid any damaging works in the countryside.

Mrs. Fenner: Our policy is to avoid or minimise damage to the countryside, and especially to sites of special scientific interest and national parks. To this end we introduced in 1980 a requirement that applicants under the capital grant schemes must notify the Nature Conservancy Council or a national park authority of any proposals they wish to carry out on a site of special scientific interest or in a national park. In the majority of instances proposals do not raise problems or, in discussion with the Ministry's Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, ways are found of overcoming them. In the very few cases where this is not possible we consider, in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment whether or not to withhold grant.

In the wider countryside, we require farmers under the capital grant schemes to have regard to conservation in undertaking investments and ADAS is available to give advice on how best to meet this requirement and on conservation generally. This may involve consultation with statutory conservation bodies and the farming and wildlife advisory groups.

Of the cases which have been referred to us for decision we have found it necessary to withhold grant in relatively few and my right hon. Friend has concurred with our decision to pay grant in the rest.

North Duffield Carrs

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will quantify the substantial agricultural benefits referred to by the Minister of State the noble Lord, Lord Belstead, at a luncheon given by the Association of Drainage Authorities on 20 November that would have accrued if the pump drainage of North Duffield Carrs had been approved.

Mrs. Fenner: The agricultural benefits that would have accrued if the Ouse and Derwent Internal Drainage Board's scheme for pumped drainage of North Duffield Carrs had been approved for grant have been evaluated at around £125 per hectare. They would have arisen from the more efficient use of the land for livestock.

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has made to the critique made by conservation bodies of the economic justification made by the Ouse and Derwent Internal Drainage Board for the pump drainage of North Duffield Carrs, in particular the charge that the cost benefit methodology employed by the Internal Drainage Board was at variance with Government approved guidelines.

Mrs. Fenner: The critique undertaken by conservation bodies of the economic justification made by the Ouse and Derwent Internal Drainage Board for pump drainage of North Duffield Carrs was taken fully into account in the consideration of the board's application for grant-aid.

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the programme of testing wildlife, particularly birds of prey, for residues of DDT, Dieldrin, Aldrin and Endrin will continue; and whether there has been an overall increase or decline in the residues of these products in the tissues and eggs of wildlife populations sampled in the periods *(a)* 1970 to 1974, *(b)* 1975 to 1979 and *(c)* 1980 to the present.

Mrs. Fenner: Current studies on residue monitoring in birds of prey undertaken by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology on behalf of the Nature Conservancy Council will continue until 1986. A decision on whether or not to continue the monitoring after 1986 will be taken early in that year.

The most-sampled and best studied species are the sparrowhawk, kestrel and heron. Liver residues of DDE (the main fat-soluble metabolite of DDT) in kestrels have decreased throughout the periods listed; in herons it decreased during the early 1970s and early 1980s but changed little in the late 1970s; in sparrowhawks there has been little change. HEOD (an active ingredient of both dieldrin and aldrin) residues in all three species showed no significant change in the early 1970s and decreased in the late 1970s. The decrease continued into the 1980s in the heron. Endrin is not included in the monitoring scheme.

Only aldrin is still used in agriculture and horticulture, the use of the other substances having been phased out since the 1960s.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what additional expenditure on the youth training scheme would be necessary in 1984-85 if the scheme were to accommodate all the 16 and 17-year-olds now unemployed in Great Britain; how many additional places would be needed; and if he has any plans to expand the scheme in 1985-86 to accommodate all the 16 and 17-year-olds who would otherwise be unemployed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Estimates of the additional expenditure needed to extend the youth training scheme in this way depend on the flow of unemployed young people during the relevant period, rather than on a single "snapshot" at a point in time, and on assumptions about their length of stay on the scheme, about the additional off-the-job training which might be provided and about the contribution which longer-duration trainees might make to output. No estimates are available for 1984-85 which take account of these factors, and which provide for all unemployed young people under 18 to be on the scheme.

On plans for the youth training scheme in 1985-86, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 9 January, at column 464. Eligibility rules for the scheme next year were announced on 12 November. Unemployed 16 and 17-year-old school and college leavers, together with employed 16-year-old leavers, and some other older groups of disabled young people, will continue to be eligible. Some special groups of 18-year-olds will also be able to take part in the scheme next year.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in training on the youth training scheme are estimated to be employees *(a)* on current year schemes and *(b)* on previous year schemes; how these figures compare with the previous year; what growth in the number of employees was expected when planning 1984-85 scheme places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are currently in training on the youth training scheme *(a)* on current year schemes and *(b)* on previous year schemes; how these figures compare with the previous year; whether they represent an increase in the take-up rate of scheme places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There were 264,972 young people in training on current year schemes, and 40,403 young people in training on previous year schemes on the youth training scheme on 28 December 1984, compared to 256,533 young people in training at the end of December 1983 all of whom were on current-year schemes. This increase in the take-up of scheme places shows that young people clearly recognise the advantages of participating in a high quality training programme.

Careers Service (Statistics)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from careers officers on the accuracy of the information collected from the careers service by the Manpower Services Commission for youth training scheme purposes; whether he is satisfied with the accuracy of the information provided by the careers service on the number of young people leaving school and the number likely to find work by 31 December 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A number of representations have been received from the careers service on this issue. The main point raised was that the deadline date of 16 October 1984 by which the information was to be returned to this Department was too early to allow accurate figures to be produced.

The Manpower Services Commission recognises the limitations on the quality of the data which the careers service provided by the given date. Nevertheless, it is felt that the information provided an early indication of likely developments which, combined with information from other sources, made a valuable input to the planning of the youth training scheme for the year ahead.

Principal careers officers are being asked to supply revised estimates later this month in the light of the better information which will then be available to them.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details of the exercise by which the careers service gave the Manpower Services Commission information on the labour market prospects of 1984-85 school leavers, showing for *(a)* 16-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds, and *(c)* 18-year-olds the number and proportion expected to leave school, and the number and proportion expected to find work outside the youth training scheme by 31 December 1985 for each Manpower Services Commission region.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is as follows. It is derived from provisional forecasts of the position in December 1985 made by principal careers officers in the autumn of 1984 and must therefore be regarded as tentative. Principal careers officers will be asked to provide revised forecasts later this month in the light of the better information which will then be available to them.

Forecast of Destination of 1984-85 School Leavers by December 1985

	16 Year Olds				*17 Year Olds*				*18 Year Olds*			
	*Leaving School and entering Labour Market**		*Employed outside YTS*		*Leaving School and entering Labour Market**		*Employed outside YTS*		*Leaving School and entering Labour Market**		*Employed outside YTS*	
	(000s)	*per cent.*	*(000s)*	*per cent.*	*(000s)*	*per cent.*	*(000s)*	*per cent.*	*(000s)*	*per cent.*	*(000s)*	*per cent.*
Scotland‡	42	42	14	14	10	39	4	17	3	36	2	20
Northern	26	66	4	11	2	23	1	7	2	22	1	10
North West†	64	60	17	16	6	24	3	10	5	24	3	15
Yorks & Humberside	48	62	13	17	6	30	3	13	4	27	2	13
Midlands	85	60	22	16	9	26	5	13	6	24	3	14
Wales	23	53	4	10	4	26	2	11	2	19	1	13
South West	35	58	13	22	4	26	2	15	4	34	3	28
South East	85	51	36	22	17	31	10	18	10	29	8	23
London†	40	49	18	22	11	35	7	20	6	36	4	24
Great Britain†‡	447	55	142	17	69	30	35	15	40	28	27	19

Notes:
* Excludes those entering Further/Higher Education
† Includes MSC estimates for some LEAs
‡ Includes SED forecasts for some LEAs
Percentages are based on the totals eligible to leave school.
All figures exclude further education college leavers and leavers from independent schools.
Ages are as at 31 August 1985.

Community Programme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make available, with reference to the survey of community programme participants that was carried out between mid-November and mid-December 1983 by the Social and Community Planning Research Centre for the Manpower Services Commission, for each of the two standard age and duration eligibility conditions, the percentage of the then participants who were (I) married *(a)* female (i) supervisory/manager or (ii) non supervisory/manager and *(b)* male (i) supervisory/manager or (ii) non supervisory/manager and (II) single *(a)* female (i) supervisory/manager or (ii) non supervisory/manager and *(b)* male (i) supervisory/manager or (ii) non supervisory/manager; what percentage of each married subgrouping had an employed spouse; what percentage of each of all subgroupings had dependent resident children of 0 to 15 years age range; and what percentage of each subgroup was in receipt of any major benefit while on the community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Available information about this survey is set out in the Social and Community Planning Research Centre report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Other information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his reply, *Official Report*, 13 December, columns *559-60*, he will give the inclusive dates for the survey from which information was derived, and give the proportion of those aged 18 to 24 years to those aged 25 years and over.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The survey to which I referred in my previous reply was conducted between June and August 1984. Of the 878 former participants surveyed, 52 per cent. were aged 18 to 24 and 48 per cent. were aged 25 and over.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill

15. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he plans to propose an amendment to the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill during its passage through another place to require the production of a current valid identity card as a precondition for the issuing of a ballot paper.

Mr. Scott: No. The Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill provides that a voter will be issued with a ballot paper on the production of one of the personal documents specified in the Bill.

Security

20. **Rev. William McCrea** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of success of the security forces in eliminating terrorism in Northern Ireland during the past month.

Mr. Hurd: The security forces, with the full support of the Government, combat terrorism by all possible means within the law. To this end, 16 persons were charged with terrorist-type offences in December; and seven weapons, 636 rounds of ammunition and 1,014 lb of explosives were recovered.

21. **Rev. Ian Paisley** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

22. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the security of the Province.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) earlier today.

Mr. Peter Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of security in Northern Ireland per head of the population in each of the last five years.

Mr. Scott: Figures are not available detailing the extra cost involved in maintaining law and order in Northern Ireland as a result of the security situation.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any Government subsidy is paid in respect of engines produced by Harland and Wolff.

Dr. Boyson: No.

Orlit Dwellings (Comber and Donaghadee)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he is yet in a position to announce the future of the Orlit dwellings in Comber and Donaghadee; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: I am advised by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that the Orlit dwellings at Comber have an estimated servicable life of 10 to 15 years and those at Donaghadee 5 to 10 years. The Housing Executive is currently examining options for dealing with its stock of Orlit dwellings at both Comber and Donaghadee and will be consulting residents and public representatives as soon as possible.

Baton Rounds

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been killed or injured to date in Northern Ireland as the result of the firing of rubber or plastic bullets.

Mr. Hurd: Fourteen people have been killed by baton rounds since they were first introduced in 1970. Since 17 March 1981, 249 people are recorded as having been injured by them.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Nurses (Pay)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the basic salary of a newly qualified staff nurse today; what was it in December 1974 expressed in 1984 prices; and what percentage increase would be needed to give the 1984 salary a purchasing value equal to that of 1974.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table. The table shows that the purchasing power of a newly qualified staff nurse increased by 4 per cent. over the period when measured against changes in the Retail Price Index and by 6 per cent. when measured against changes in the Tax and Prices Index. Comparable information on earnings over this period is not available. In addition to pay increases, nurses' hours were reduced from 40 to 37½ per week in 1980-81.

Staff Nurse: Basic Salary

		Minimum	*Maximum*
Basic salary at December 1984	£	5,398	6,582
Basic salary 1 December 1974 at November 1984 prices*			
RPI	£	5,193	6,759
TPI	£	5,090	6,624
Percentage increase needed to give 1974 purchasing power			
RPI	Per cent.	−4	+3
TPI	Per cent.	−6	+1

* Latest available figure for Retail Price Index and Tax and Prices Index.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what calculation has been made of the stock losses associated with the introduction of a limited list; and what provision has been made for compensation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) on 17 December at columns *45-46*. I have no information to demonstrate that stock losses to companies or pharmacies when the limited list is introduced on 1 April will be significant.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many letters he has received arising from his decision to reduce the drugs available for prescription on the National Health Service; and, of these, how many were in favour of the proposal and how many against.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: So far we have received over 1,600 letters commenting on our proposals to limit the range of drugs available in certain therapeutic categories. Of these, about 100 have unequivocally supported the proposals. The remainder have expressed doubts or declared opposition but many of these letters, including about 250 circular letters supplied to doctors by the drug industry, have shown an imperfect understanding of our proposals. In addition, some 650 replies have been received from doctors to the Chief Medical Officer's letter of 14 December. These have contained constructive suggestions about the medicines that should remain available to meet clinical needs.

Health Authorities (Appointments)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that the appointments of the chairmen and members to district and regional health authorities made during the last five years fall within the guidelines issued in the National Health Services Act 1977.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are not aware of any contravention of the National Health Service Act 1977 in appointments that have been made by Secretaries of State over the past five years. My right hon. Friend does not appoint members of district health authorities. He does appoint the chairmen and members of regional health authorities and the chairmen of district health authorities.

Hospitals (Communications and Transport)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take to ensure that National Health Service hospitals are equipped with modes of communication other than telephones and with methods of transport other than lifts.

Mr. John Patten: The Department provides guidance to health authorities on effective on-site and wide-area radio paging systems for staff location, hand portable and vehicle mounted mobile radio systems, nurse-call systems and direct speech communication systems other than telephones. The Department's nucleus hospital building programme is based on a policy for material handling using tugs and trolley trains, with ramps between floors where this is cost-effective. Existing hospitals will continue to take their own decisions on cost-effective transportation systems.

Supplementary Benefit

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of citizens registered as supplementary benefit claimants in the constituencies of Blaby, Bridgwater and Finchley.

Mr. Whitney: Blaby is served for supplementary benefit purposes by one DHSS office. The total number of supplementary benefit cases handled by this office at 12 December 1984 was 8,100.

Bridgwater and Finchley are each served for supplementary benefit purposes by more than one DHSS office and the boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency boundaries. The total numbers of supplementary benefit cases handled by the respective offices at 12 December 1984 were as follows:

	Number
Bridgwater	
Bridgwater	7,400
Taunton	10,400
Finchley	
Barnet	7,000
Hendon	10,100
Highgate	16,600
Wood Green	8,300

Hospitals

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many new hospitals have become operational since May 1979; and how many beds these will provide.

Mr. John Patten: A total of 38 major hospital schemes providing 12,035 beds have been completed between 1 May 1979 and 31 December 1984.

Contraception (Under-age Girls)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the Court of Appeal's decision of 20 December in the Gillick case, he has any plans to introduce legislation requiring general practitioners to inform parents before they prescribe contraceptives for girls under the age of consent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Following the judgment by the Court of Appeal, the position in law is that, except in an emergency or with the leave of a court, a doctor or other health professional must obtain parental consent before prescribing contraceptives to a girl under 16. We have announced our intention to appeal against the judgment, and it would be premature to consider legislation before the House of Lords has given its decision on the appeal.

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the quantity of foetal material by weight, excluding placenta, and by numbers of individual foetuses, supplied by hospitals in each of the last three years for which figures are available, and the weights and numbers supplied by each private nursing home licensed by his Department to National Health Service hospitals or research establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek to introduce, in consultation with other member states of the European Economic Community, measures to outlaw international trade in dead foetal material.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have no evidence that any such international trade takes place to or from this country and therefore no reason to take action to regulate it.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the arrangements covering transportation, storage costs and possible loss or theft of foetal material between private nursing homes approved by his Department to supply National Health Service establishments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: These arrangements are for the nursing homes and research establishments concerned, and we do not collect this information.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services by what means dead foetal material from private nursing homes is transported to the foetal tissue bank at the Royal Marsden hospital; and what arrangements exist to pay for the costs of such transportation between these private nursing homes and the Royal Marsden hospital or its tissue bank.

Mr. Kennth Clarke: I understand that the material is collected from the nursing homes by nominated employees of the Medical Research Council and any costs associated with such transportation are met from the council's grant to the foetal tissue bank.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific information prompted officials of his Department to carry out an investigation into allegations of a trade in foetal material between the United Kingdom and France; and on what basis his Department was able to decide that allegations of a trade were unfounded.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The allegations referred to were no more specific than that foetal material was being exported from the United Kingdom to French laboratories for the manufacture of cosmetics. Our Department's detailed inquiries in both France and the United Kingdom produced no evidence of any kind to substantiate the allegations.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what responsibility is placed upon officials of his Department to oversee the storage, transportation and disposal of dead foetal material from abortions in private nursing homes, National Health Service hospitals and research centres and establishments under the control of the Medical Research Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Our Department approves the arrangements for the supply of foetal material by nursing homes approved under the Abortion Act. Arrangements for the supply of material by NHS hospitals and the Medical Research Council are the responsibility of their individual establishments. The use and disposal of foetal material is controlled very closely, in accordance with the code of practice recommended in the report of the advisory group on the use of foetuses and foetal material for research (the Peel report 1972).

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has received any information regarding a trade in human pituitary glands or dead foetuses as a result of the trial and conviction of Dr. Mark Patterson at the Old Bailey in July 1984 for conspiracy to sell blood; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have received no information about any trade of this kind in connection with the trial and conviction of Dr. Mark Patterson.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Robert nursing home is approved to supply foetal material from abortions to any institution other than the Birmingham university medical school; and for what purpose this material is required by this hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The supply of material is approved to the Birmingham university medical school for the study of genetics, umbilical vessels, comparative histology, cancer and foetal development.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Wistans nursing home is

approved to supply foetal material to any institution other than St. Bartholomew's hospital and the East Birmingham hospital; and for what purpose this material is required at these two hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The supply of material is approved for the production of purified alphafetoprotein for screening neural tube defects and for research on chorionic villus sampling.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if the London Private hospital, the Park View clinic or the Raleigh nursing home are approved to supply foetal material from abortions to any institution other than the foetal tissue bank, Royal Marsden hospital; and for what purpose this material is required by the Royal Marsden hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The material is required for a variety of approved research projects on virology, immunology, oncology, biochemistry and molecular biology.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Calthorpe nursing home is approved to supply foetal material from abortions to any institution other than the Birmingham children's hospital, East Birmingham hospital and the Birmingham hospital; and for what purpose this material is required by these hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The supply of material is approved to the Birmingham children's hospital for routine diagnostic work, and to the East Birmingham hospital and the Birmingham maternity hospital for research on chorionic villus sampling.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Blackdown nursing home is approved to supply foetal material from abortions to any institution other than the Birmingham maternity hospital and the East Birmingham hospital; and for what purpose this material is required by these hospitals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The supply of material is approved for research on chorionic villus sampling.

AIDS (Blood Donors)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make funds available to health authorities to compensate them for expenses incurred in screening blood donors for acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 22 November 1984 to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) at column *326*.

Social Security Conventions

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the bodies within the United Kingdom that he is consulting on the extension of social security conventions with various European countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The existing bilateral social security conventions with other European Community member states, which are out of date and cover only persons and matters not covered by the European Community social security regulations, will, subject to the views of the member States concerned, be revised and updated to take account of current legislation. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office, and the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey are being consulted.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many families in the London borough of Waltham Forest are receiving family income supplement; and what was the comparable figure in May 1979.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that this information is not available. Family income supplement claims are dealt with by one centre at Blackpool and no information is maintained about claims from particular local areas.

SCOTLAND

James Miller and Partners Ltd. (Planning Inquiry)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be in a position to announce his decision on the planning inquiry in relation to the land owned by James Miller and Partners Ltd. at Cultins road, Edinburgh.

Mr. Ancram: It has proved necessary to communicate with the parties about certain new evidence which has been sent to my right hon. Friend. A decision will be reached as soon as possible.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. McTaggart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total of public expenditure on housing in Scotland in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available; and what percentage of total public expenditure in Scotland each figure represented in each respective year.

Mr. Ancram: Total public expenditure on housing in Scotland in 1979-80 was £734 million which amounted to 16·1 per cent. of the total public expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility. In 1983-84 (the latest year for which final figures are available) housing expenditure totalled £712 million, the equivalent percentage being 10·6 per cent.

The above figures are, as is usual with public expenditure, in net terms. As a measure of the resources available for spending, gross figures are more relevant. These show that capital expenditure on housing rose from £421 million in 1979-80 to £703 million in 1983-84 (a rise from 9·2 per cent. to 10·5 per cent. in the proportion of total public expenditure within the Secretary of State's responsibility).

Protection Orders

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list the areas covered by protection orders which have been granted and protection orders which have been applied for under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 and the conditions under which protection has been granted or requested.

Mr. John MacKay: Formal proposals for protection orders in terms of the 1976 Act have been published in

respect of four areas. Following compliance with the statutory procedures the Secretary of State was satisfied that the conditions on access and so on laid down in the Act had been met and protection orders for initial periods of three years were made. These are listed below:

The Rivers Tweed and Eye Protection Order 1980 (renewed by the Rivers Tweed and Eye Protection (Renewal) Order 1983) (S.I. 1980 No. 400 (s. 40) and S.I. 1983 No. 389 (s. 37)).

The Upper Spey and Associated Waters Protection Order 1982 (S.I. 1982 No. 377 (s. 48)).

The River Tummel Catchment Area Protection Order 1983 (S.I. 1983 No. 390 (s. 38)).

The River Lunan Catchment Area Protection Order 1983 (S.I. 1983 No. 391 (s. 39)).

Details of the areas covered by those protection orders are contained in the relevant statutory instruments, copies of which are available in the Library.

Inquiries have been received about the obtaining of protection orders for catchment areas of the river Don, river Tay, river Garnock and the rivers Annick and Irvine. None of these has yet gone beyond the preliminary stages.

Barnacle Geese

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many licences he has so far granted to allow the killing of barnacle geese in the winter of 1984-85 upon Islay, Strathclyde; and what conditions have been attached to licences so issued.

Mr. John MacKay: Up to 4 January 1985 26 licences have been issued in the 1984-85 season to shoot barnacle geese on Islay. The conditions of a licence are as follows:

1. the area(s) within which such killing or taking is authorised shall be be the farm(s) . . . on the island of Islay but shall exclude any areas of foreshore, permanent grass outrun(s) not part of the normal utilisable area(s) of the farm(s) and all rough grazings including bogland;
2. flight shooting at the sea wall is also excluded;
3. the granting of this licence does not authorise the killing or taking of wild barnacle geese unless:
   (a) such killing or taking is carried out for the purpose of preventing serious damage;
   (b) there is no other satisfactory course of action for preventing such serious damage;
4. the methods by which the wild geese may be killed or taken shall be any which is not made unlawful by section 5 of the Act except that no decoy of any kind, including calls or lures whether natural or artificial, shall be used for the purpose of killing or taking;
5. if so required by a police constable and within such reasonable time as may be specified, this licence shall be produced by the licensee;
6. no later than one month after the date on which this licence expires or otherwise comes to an end, the licensee shall provide the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland with a report on the form provided of the occasions on which the wild geese were killed or taken, and the numbers of geese killed or taken: at the same time the licensee shall return to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland the corresponding licence;
7. particulars of this licence and of the report which the licensee is required to provide may be made available by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to any person or organisation who is considered by the Department to have reasonable grounds for having such information; and
8. this licence may be modified or revoked by the Secretary of State for Scotland at any time without prior notice and, if not so revoked, shall expire at midnight on the thirtieth day of April, nineteen hundred and eighty-five.

In addition, a licence issued to a landlord contains the following further condition:

at any time the numbers of persons who may be authorised by subsidiary licences by the licensee shall not exceed 4 in respect of the area named above except where the licensee participates in the killing or taking when the number shall not exceed 3.

Each licence issued is accompanied by notes and also by notes for guidance.

Forestry Commission

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Forestry Commission will make it its practice, in pursuance of its responsibilities under section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968, to reject claims for grant under the dedication schemes or forestry grant scheme in cases where the Government's statutory advisors on nature conservation consider that serious damage to the countryside would result if the scheme went ahead; and if the Forestry Commission is prepared to require the amendment of forestry schemes put to it for grant by private forestry interests in order to safeguard conservation interests.

Mr. John MacKay: The Nature Conservancy Council is consulted by the Forestry Commission over all applications for grant-aid for the planting of trees on sites of special scientific interest. If the council objects to a planting proposal, and the applicant is not prepared to modify or withdraw it, the Forestry Commissioners can refuse the application. On the other hand, in such circumstances the commissioners may not commit themselves to paying grant without first seeking a ministerial view.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total expenditure of Scottish local authorities expressed at November 1983 prices for each of the years from 1978-79.

Mr. Ancram: The only local authority expenditure information available at November 1983 prices is expenditure relevant for rate support grant purposes, excluding loan charges. This information is set out in table A. Total local authority expenditure as shown in the 1984 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143), adjusted by means of the GDP deflator to 1983-84 prices, is given in table B. The current expenditure figures in table B are not directly comparable with those given in table A because in the case of table B:

a. they include expenditure not relevant for rate support grant eg housing;
b. they exclude capital expenditure financed from revenue and the interest receipts deduction;
c. the 1984-85 figures are the Government-planned provision, not local authorities' budget estimates (which are above provision);
d. the price base used is different.

TABLE A

Local authority expenditure in Scotland relevant for rate support grant purposes, excluding loan charges
(£ million at November 1983 prices)

	£
1978-79	2,684
1979-80	2,716
1980-81	2,757
1981-82	2,719
1982-83	2,709
1983-84	2,742
1984-85	2,753

Notes:

1. The figures for 1978-79 to 1983-84 are final or near final outturns: the figure for 1984-85 is the aggregate of authorities' budget estimates. The figure for 1978-79 has been adjusted to take account of a change in the definition of relevant expenditure as from 1979-80.
2. The figures have been revalued from cash to November 1983 prices using factors agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. All the expenditure figures themselves, other than that for 1983-84, have been agreed with the Convention: the figure for 1983-84 is based on returns only recently received from authorities.

TABLE B

Total local authority expenditure in Scotland

(£ million at 1983-84 prices)

	Current	*Capital*	*Total*
1978-79	2,597	905	3,502
1979-80	2,671	896	3,568
1980-81	2,764	747	3,511
1981-82	2,872	688	3,559
1982-83	2,933	652	3,585
1983-84	3,100	680	3,780
1984-85	2,908	664	3,572

Note:

1. The figures for 1978-79 to 1983-84 are based on actual expenditure. The figure for 1984-85 is the Government's planned public expenditure provision.

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those private nursing homes and National Health Service hospitals licensed by the Scottish Home and Health Department to supply dead foetal material to National Health Service and private research institutions; what quantity of foetal material is supplied; whether a charge is made for this supply; and for what purpose foetal material is required by these research institutions.

Mr. John MacKay: Any arrangements for the supply of foetal material from NHS hospitals are the responsibility of individual health boards and no information about this is held centrally. Approved nursing homes are required to make application to my Department if they propose to supply foetal material, but no application has been submitted. A code of practice on the use of disposal of foetal material was recommended in the report in 1972 of the advisory group on the use of foetuses and foetal material for research (the Peel report).

DEFENCE

Royal Ordnance plc (Memorandum of Understanding)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now publish the memorandum of understanding between himself and the chairman of the Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Butler: A copy of the memorandum of understanding has been placed in the Library on 9 January.

Army Cataloguing Authority

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet able to announce the outcome of his review of the proposed dispersal of the Army cataloguing authority to Glasgow.

Mr. Butler: Yes, I have reviewed the Glasgow dispersal package in the light of the conclusions of a recently completed study of the deployment of the Army's manning and record offices and regimental pay offices. Subject to consultation with the staff and trades unions concerned, I now propose to increase the number of posts from those offices to be dispersed to Glasgow: plans to disperse the Defence and Navy codification authorities will proceed, but the ACA will no longer be included in this dispersal package.

The overall MOD commitment to disperse at least 1,400 posts to Glasgow and the proposed time table for the dispersal programme will not be affected.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish or make available a list of the names, service, service numbers and ranks of those service personel involved in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958 who constitute part of the present study by the National Radiological Protection Board.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *377*]: As a matter of policy, we do not publicly disclose information of this sort about present or former members of the armed forces.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish or make available a list of the names, service, service number and ranks of those service personnel who were involved in incurring additional risks in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958; and if he will give details of the planned special exposure level of radiation incurred by these individuals.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *377*]: It would be a breach of personal privacy to publish such a list. The small number of individuals involved—fewer than 30—were exposed to a whole body radiation dose greater than 70 mSv but less than 200 mSv, a range which conformed with the International Commission for Radiological Protection's recommendations and which is comparable with present-day internationally recommended limits for emergency exposures (referred to at the time of the tests as planned special exposures).

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the records of the dosages of radiation incurred by the service personnel involved in the nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958, inclusive, will be made available to the National Radiological Protection Board; and if the original dosimeters and personnel film badges will also be made available to the National Radiological Protection Board.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *377*]: Yes. The records of exposure to radiation incurred by service personnel have been made available to the National Radiological Protection Board. The original dosimeters and personal film badges are no longer available.

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the appropriate protection provided to the service personnel involved in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958.

Mr. Butler [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *377*]: The protection against the effects of nuclear

explosions which was provided to service personnel involved in the series of nuclear tests carried out between 3 October 1952 and 23 September 1958 varied according to the nature of their duties and of the radiation environment. Its purpose was to ensure that personnel should not be harmed by the effects of the explosion or exposed to levels of ionising radiation in excess of the prescribed limits.

At the moment of detonation, personnel were positioned at sufficient distance for the initial ionising radiation to be absorbed by the atmosphere and not reach them at a sufficient intensity to be harmful. No additional protection from the initial ionising radiation was necessary. However, personnel were required to turn their backs to the explosion in order to protect their eyes from the flash immediately following detonation. There was no need for special protection against the other effects of blast and heat at the distances at which personnel were stationed.

After detonation, where there was an operational need for personnel to enter or work in areas where there was a risk of contamination from radioactive debris, full protective clothing and respirators were used until the most hazardous areas were delineated and a lesser degree of protection would suffice. On each occasion the precise form of protection needed in each area depended on day to day assessment by the Health Physics Control. The form of protection varied with the tasks being performed.

The great majority of those involved in the test programme did not need to enter any areas of contamination and therefore did not require any special protection.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Foetal Material

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his written answer of 11 December 1984, *Official Report*, columns *455* and *456*, whether he will instruct Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers to investigate the exportation of dead foetal material between the United Kingdom and abroad.

Mr. Hayhoe: No.

Postpersons (Christmas Tips)

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue has a standard system for treatment of postpersons' Christmas tips.

Mr. Hayhoe: In law, Christmas tips are part of an employee's income in the same way as his other earnings. Inspectors of taxes exercise their judgment in estimating the assessable amount of tips, using all the information available. Any employee who disagrees with the amount of tips assessed or included in his PAYE coding may appeal and if necessary have the matter heard by the independent general commissioners.

Local Authority Borrowing

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances local authority borrowing adds to the money supply; and what is the current extent of such circumstances.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Local authority borrowing adds to sterling M3 when financed in such a way as to lead to the creation of private sector sterling bank deposits. When such borrowing is funded, directly or indirectly, by sales of public sector debt to the non-bank private sector, it does not add to the money supply. In the first eight months of 1984-85, net local authority borrowing was some £¾ billion. Sales of gilt-edged are not hypothecated to local authority borrowing. However, it is not possible to estimate the effect on the money supply of that borrowing. Of course local authority borrowing increases the total amount of funding required to maintain monetary control, adding to demands placed on the capital market and therefore tending to raise interest rates above what they would otherwise be.

EC (Gross Domestic Product)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for the last eight six-monthly periods for which figures are available, for each member state of the European Economic Community and for the European Economic Community as a whole (i) increase in nominal gross domestic product, (ii) increase in gross domestic product output volume, (iii) increase in gross domestic product price deflator, (iv) seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment, (v) surplus in trading goods and (vi) surplus in invisible goods.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 December 1984, c. *357*]: The information required can be derived from the latest issue (No. 11, 1984) of "Eurostatistics—Data for short-term economic analysis" and CRONOS (the Eurostat data bank) for (i) increase in nominal gross domestic product, (ii) increase in gross domestic product volume, (iii) increase in gross domestic product price deflator, (v) surplus in trading goods and (vi) surplus in invisible transactions.

Item (iv) seasonally adjusted rates of unemployment for the EC and member countries are not readily available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, information on a quarterly basis for some member countries is available in OECD "Main Economic Indicators".

Copies of the publications referred to are available in the House of Commons Library. The Library also has access to the CRONOS databank.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to include in the next economic progress report a chart comparing actual unemployment figures with the figures for the relevant period predicted by independent forecasters and the assumptions for the relevant period provided by the Government to the Government Actuary.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *486*]: A direct comparison between independent forecasts of unemployment and the assumptions provided by the Government to the Government Actuary is not possible. The Government assumptions, used for planning public expenditure, are financial year averages and relate to Great Britain, while most independent forecasters predict United Kingdom unemployment and do not provide sufficient information from which to calculate financial year averages. Comparisons between forecasts or

assumptions and actual unemployment figures are affected by changes in the method of counting unemployment, introduced at the end of 1982, and by the provisions, announced in the 1983 Budget, which removed the requirement for some men over 60 to sign at unemployment offices. Therefore, I do not propose to publish the chart requested. However, the following is a table of comparisons.

Independent Forecasts: United Kingdom Adult Unemployment

Millions

Period to which forecast relates	*Consensus‡ of independent forecasts made four quarters previously*	*Outturn*	
1980 Q4	1·6	2·0	Registrants
1981 Q4	2·4	2·8	Basis
1982 Q4*	2·8	2·9	
1983 Q4*†	3·2	2·9	
1984 Q4	3·0	3·1	Claimants Basis

Unemployment assumptions (Great Britain adult) published in Government Actuary's Department Reports

Millions

Date of publication	*Year to which assumption relates*	*Assumption*	*Outturn*	
1979 November	1980-81	1·6	1·8	Registrants
1980 November	1981-82	2·3	2·6	Basis
1981 December*	1982-83	2·9	2·8	
1982 November*	1983-84	3·2	2·9	
1983 November	1984-85	2·85	‖[3·0]	Claimants Basis

* Forecast/assumption on registrants basis, outturn on claimants basis.

† Forecast/assumptions do not reflect effect of 1983 Budget provisions.

‡ Consensus defined as average of leading independent forecasts. For 1983 Q4 excludes two forecasting groups which had begun to forecast on claimants basis.

‖ Figure published in November 1984 GAD report.

EC Budget

Mr. Spearing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate in the *Official Report* the expenditure of the European Economic Communities for 1984 authorised prior to the introduction of Supplementary Budget No. 1, together with the expenditure authorised by that budget, for each main purpose and under subheadings of obligatory and non-obligatory expenditure, respectively.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *487*]: The information requested is given in the following table. It has been extracted from *Official Journals* Nos. L329 of 1984 (supplementary budget) and L12 of 1984 (1984 budget) which are both available from the House of Commons Library. The information given is in millions of ecus and commitment and payment appropriations are shown separately.

1984 Budget taking into account the 1984 Supplementary Budget No. 1

Budget Title	*1984 Budget*				*Supplementary No. 1*			
	Non-obligatory		*Obligatory*		*Non-obligatory*		*Obligatory*	
	(C)	*(P)*	*(C)*	*(P)*	*(C)*	*(P)*	*(C)*	*(P)*
Commission Section A								
Commission Administration	797*		6*			†8		
Commission Section B								
Agriculture Guarantee	—	—	16,150*		—	—	1,833*	
Agriculture Guidance	195	142	556	514	—	+1	—	+3
Fisheries	72	25	76	76	—	—	+11	+11
Regional	2,186	1,455	PM	PM	No Change		No Change	
Social	2,000	1,369	—	—	+0·1	+0·1	—	—
Industry, Energy etc	846	644	PM	PM	+134	+54	—	—
Loans and guarantees	—	—	1,103	1,103	—	—	+47	+47
Aid	762	635	257	258	No Change		No Change	
Commission Contingency Reserve	†1,945	†1,760	—	—	†−145	†−69	—	—
Other Institutions								
European Parliament	239*		—	—	No Change		No Change	
Council	137*		—	—	No Change		No Change	
Economic and Social Committee	25*		—	—	No Change		No Change	
Court of Justice	31*		—	—	No Change		No Change	
Court of Auditors	18*		—	—	No Change		No Change	
Total Other Institutions	450							

* Non differentiated appropriations

† A split between obligatory and non-obligatory is not readily available

C = Commitment appropriations. P = Payment appropriations

PM = Token entry (pour memoire)

£1 Note

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider introducing a higher denomination note, such as a £2·50 note, to replace the £1 note.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *486*]: The case for a higher denomination note, between £1 and £5, was fully considered before the introduction of the £1 coin and the decision to replace the £1 note. But recent experience of double unit notes, for example in the USA and France, does not suggest that it would be justified. The current purchasing power of £2·50 is approximately the same as that of the 10s note when it was withdrawn in 1970.

Construction Industry

Mr. Rooker asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the contribution of the construction industry to the economy in respect of gross domestic product, employment, exports and tax revenue, including building materials producers where appropriate; and how the position compares with five and 10 years previously.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *487*]: The following table gives the figures requested in terms of the percentage contribution of the construction industry (and, where this information is available, building materials producers) to the relevant totals.

	1973 *per cent.*	*1978* *per cent.*	*1983* *per cent.*
Gross Domestic Product at factor cost, income based, (includes building materials producers)	13	11	10
Employment (construction only)	5·8	5·3	4·8
Exports (building materials producers only)	n.a.	3	2
	(1971-72)	*(1976-77)*	*(1981-82)*
Tax revenue	n.a.	6·3	4·8

Books (Prosecutions)

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions have been mounted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise since 1979 against books listed in the edition of *British Books in Print* current at the time of prosecution.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1985, c. *488*]: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those sites where the Nature Conservancy Council considers there has been a breach of section 28(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and which are the subject of prosecutions or legal proceedings.

Mr. Gow: Two prosecutions under section 28(5) have been concluded in respect of sites at Ulverscroft Valley, Leicestershire and Gwennydd Yr Afon Fach, Dyfed. Proceedings are in progress in respect of a site at Broadstone Meadow, Hereford and Worcestershire. In a further case in Scotland, the procurator fiscal decided not to proceed.

It would not be appropriate to publicise information about possible breaches of section 28(5), as this might prejudice any eventual legal action.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the 156 sites of special scientific interest reported by the Nature Conservancy Council in its 10th annual report as damaged or destroyed.

Mr. Gow: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

National Heritage Memorial Fund

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many requests for assistance have been received by the National Heritage Memorial Fund each year since 1980; and if he will list those that were unsuccessful and failed to attract support from the fund.

Mr. Macfarlane: For each of the last four years the total number of applications and those that were unsuccessful was as follows. The NHMF does not release details of unsuccessful applications:

	Total applications	*Unsuccessful*
1980-81	181	135
1981-82	228	148
1982-83	234	143
1983-84	274	165

Housing Corporation

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the allocation of resources to the Housing Corporation for 1985-86 compares in real terms with the previous four years.

Mr. Gow: Public expenditure resource provision for the Housing Corporation for 1985-86, compared with outturn for the previous four years is as follows:

Housing Corporation: Net Provision for Housing Association Development

£ million

	Cash	*1985-86 Prices*
1981-82 Out turn	492	607
1982-83 Out turn	680	787
1983-84 Out turn	624	688
1984-85 Forecast Out turn	617	648
1985-86 Provision	605	605

The corporation's gross capital expenditure, comprising the above net provision plus receipts from sales of properties and loan repayments, is as follows:

Housing Corporation: Gross capital expenditure

£ million

	Cash	*1985-86 Prices*
1981-82 Out turn	548	676
1982-83 Out turn	755	874
1983-84 Out turn	734	809
1984-85 Forecast Out turn	687	721
1985-86 Provision	685	685

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement setting out the information the Government obtain in relation to the use of both spent and unspent capital receipts of local authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Central Government do not collect information on the use which local authorities make of their capital receipts. So far as housing capital expenditure and capital receipts for 1983-84 are concerned, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) on 20 July 1984, at column 360.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 11 January 1985

EMPLOYMENT

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the expenditure per pupil for those involved in the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The total projected cost to the Manpower Services Commission of the first 62 projects under the technical and vocational education initiative is some £150 million. These provide for some 62,000 entrants, which gives an average cost over the period of the experiment of some £2,400 per entrant. This includes substantial initial non-recurrent development costs but excludes local authority costs.

TRANSPORT

Coal Imports

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total capacity for the import of coal at British ports.

Mr. David Mitchell: No meaningful estimate can be made of the total coal importing capacity at British ports given the variety of types and sizes of facilities which could handle such traffic.

Motor Rallies

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to clarify sections 14 and 35 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 concerning motor rallies on public rights of way; and whether in the meantime he will issue a departmental circular to local authorities reminding them of the correct procedures for the authorisation of such rallies.

Mrs. Chalker: Consideration is being given at present to the relationship between sections 14 and 35 of the Road Traffic Act 1972. If clarification is needed, legislation will be introduced when a suitable opportunity occurs. Advice to local authorities, in the form of a circular roads, would be premature at this time.

PRIME MINISTER

Research and Development

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will publish the Cabinet Office figures for 1979 and each year until 1984, and the projections for each year 1985 until 1990, giving the total of civilian and military research and development expenditure.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is published in the "Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development 1984", HMSO, ISBN 011 630826 5, table 2.1, for the years 1981-82 to 1986-87. No projections are available for the years after 1986-87, the last year covered by the most recent public expenditure survey. Similar material for the period before that covered by the Cabinet Office exercise, collected for statistical purposes by the Department of Trade and Industry, has been published in the article "Research and Development in the United Kingdom in 1981", *Economic Trends*, August 1984, p. 81-96, table B.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Oslo and Paris Commissions

Mr. Charles Morrison asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to mark the end of the first 10 years of the Oslo and Paris commissions.

Mr. MacGregor: A book entitled "The Oslo and Paris Commissions: The First Decade — International Co-operation in Protecting Our Marine Environment" has been published by the Oslo and Paris Secretariat, New Court, 48 Carey Street, London WC2A 2JE. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

The book records the history of, and progress made by, the commissions over the past 10 years and contains chapters on the national policies of the contracting parties towards waste management and waste disposal. The depositing of wastes in the sea and the discharging of wastes from the land to the aquatic environment are considered in the context of overall national waste disposal strategies.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Corporation

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what account the allocation of resources to the Housing Corporation announced on 18 December takes of the imposition of value added tax on building alterations.

Mr. Gow: The announcement on 18 December of the provision of net capital resources for the Housing Corporation of £605 million plus estimated capital receipts of £80 million takes full account of the effect of value added tax. I shall be announcing shortly the breakdown of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the airfield at Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Excellent progress has been made with the work during 1984 as hon. Members who have visited the site in the last few months will know. Provided there is reasonable weather during the current Falklands summer, there is every prospect that the time lost because of the two dock strikes last year will be recovered and that the main runway will be ready on schedule at the end of April. I pay tribute to all concerned with the project, the

management and work force of the contractor (the Laing-Mowlem-Amey Roadstone Construction joint venture), PSA and its consultants, for what they have achieved so far.

Rating (Disabled Persons)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of people who obtained relief under section 1 of the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978 in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the average rate reduction in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Figures for years prior to 1983-84 are not available in the detail requested, and for that year complete figures are not yet available. By the end of December 1984 292 of 367 local authorities concerned in England had made final claims for rate payments towards mandatory relief under section 1 of the Rating (Disabled Persons) Act 1978. In those authorities 65,889 households had received relief totalling £6,029,747, an average per household of £91·51.

Centre 21, Enderby

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now give his reasons for ordering a new inquiry into the proposed superstore Centre 21, at Enderby, Leicestershire.

Mr. Macfarlane: The inquiry is to be reopened so that differing estimates of the impact of the proposals on central Leicester can be examined in detail before the appeal is redetermined.

Rye Harbour

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations took place with his Department before 25 acres of the Rye harbour site of special scientific interest were bulldozed and drained in 1983; whether he is considering restoration of the site of special scientific interest; and if he will make a statement on the future protection of this site.

Mr. Gow: The Rye harbour SSSI, which was first notified under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, has been afforded the fuller statutory protection of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 since September 1984, when the Nature Conservancy Council gave notice of the scientific interest of the site to landowners and occupiers.

Prior to the re-notification of the site landowners and occupiers were not obliged to consult the Nature Conservancy Council before carrying out work. However I understand that although some damage occurred before the site was re-notified, it was not severe and should not have any lasting effect. The site is now fully protected as a SSSI.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Addicts

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of registered drug addicts in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Essex and Basildon; and what steps he is taking to reduce these figures.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available information on narcotic drug addicts notified to the Home Office in England and Wales and Essex relates to 1983 and is given in Tables 3.11-3.13 of "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs, United Kingdom, Supplementary Tables", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Corresponding figures for Basildon could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In regard to the final part of the question, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) on 22 November 1984, at column *397-98*.

Police Officers (NHS and Dental Treatment)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why police officers are reimbursed the cost of National Health Service prescriptions and dental treatment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Before the introduction of the National Health Service, police officers were provided with free medical and dental treatment as part of their conditions of service. When NHS charges were first introduced, it was agreed that police officers should not be required to pay for treatment to which they had previously been entitled free of charge. Provision was therefore made in the police regulations for reimbursement of the costs of NHS prescriptions and dental treatment.

Coal Industry Dispute (Policing)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many man-days have been worked by the Metropolitan police on duties in the coalfield areas since their first duties there; and how many complaints about their behaviour have been made in the same period.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 14 March and 31 December 1984, aid provided by the Metropolitan police to other police forces in connection with the miners' dispute has amounted to some 204,000 man days.

During the same period, 11 complaints under section 49 of the Police Act 1964 have been received by the Metropolitan police against their officers arising from duties in mining areas.

Immigration

Mr. Mark Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he proposes to introduce in the immigration appeals system following consideration of comments on the discussion document "Review of Appeals under the Immigration Act 1971."

Mr. Brittan: The primary aim of the Government's review was to identify ways of reducing the unacceptable delays in the appeals system. Over the period of the review, however, delays have been greatly reduced. At the end of November 1984 the number of appeals awaiting hearing was about 9,500 compared with 16,350 at the end of 1979, and the average delay in the hearing centres was reduced, over the same period, from 14 months to three to four months. The objective of the review has therefore largely been achieved. We do not propose at this time to introduce any changes in rights of appeal, for example for illegal entrants before removal, although this will be

considered when a suitable opportunity presents itself to amend the Immigration Act 1971. In the meantime there are a number of minor and tidying up changes which it is proposed to make to the Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1972 and the Immigration Appeals (Notices) Regulations 1972; and revised rules and regulations, both of which are subject to negative resolution of both Houses, will be laid shortly. These changes have the support of the appellate authorities.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to receive the report of the review group on the Rutherford-Appleton laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No such review group exists.

DEFENCE

Type 22 Frigates

Mr Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to make a decision about orders for two type 22 Broadsword class frigates.

Mr. Lee: A decision on the placing of orders for a further two type 22 frigates will be taken as soon as possible.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest cost estimate of a type 22 frigate, with stores, spare parts and ammunition.

Mr. Lee: The average cost of a batch III type 22 frigate is currently estimated at about £140 million at 1984-85 prices. The cost of embarked helicopters, the first outfit of stores, spare parts and ammunition are estimated at about £18 million at the same price level.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the estimated cost of a type 23 Duke class frigate in 1981.

Mr. Lee: The average cost of the type 23 frigate, as then envisaged, was estimated at £75 million at September 1980 prices. This is equivalent to £103 million at 1984-85 prices.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest cost estimate of a type 23 Duke class frigate.

Mr. Lee: The average cost of the type 23 frigate is currently estimated at £110 million at 1984-85 prices. This includes the cost of design changes judged necessary as a result of lessons learned from the Falklands campaign.

Mr. Dalyell: asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many type 23 frigates will be ordered.

Mr. Lee: No decision has been taken on the number of type 23 frigates to be built.

Nimrod Radar Programme

Mr. Dalyell: asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the overrun in the Nimrod airborne radar programme; and how many months this programme is behind schedule.

Mr. Butler: Because of difficulties with the radar, the Nimrod AEW aircraft did not enter service in 1984 as we had announced in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984" (Cmnd 9227-I). We are assessing the various options for bringing the project to completion. Until a way forward has been agreed, it is not possible to determine by how much in real terms the project will exceed original estimates, nor by how long the programme as a whole will be delayed.

RAF Budget

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the overspend in the Royal Air Force budget in 1984-85 to date; and what is the projected overspend in 1985-86.

Mr. Butler: There is no separate budget for the Royal Air Force, but a single defence block budget. Overall defence expenditure for 1984-85 is expected to be contained within the cash provision. The Defence Estimates for 1985-86 will be presented to Parliament this spring.

Ocean-going Tug (Sinking)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the sinking of an ocean-going tug off the Isle of Wight on 24 December 1984 on its way to the Falklands.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January 1984, c. *460*]: MV Implacable, an ocean-going tug, was chartered last year for use on naval tasks in the Falkland Islands. On her way to the south Atlantic the vessel capsized off the Isle of Wight on 24 December. I regret to say that the chief engineer is missing, presumed drowned. The rest of the crew were rescued. There were no Ministry of Defence personnel on board. An investigation into the loss is being conducted by the marine directorate of the Department of Transport.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Intra-Community Travel Allowances

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information Her Majesty's Government have relating to the request by the Republic of Ireland for a further derogation from the European Economic Community directive relating to intra-Community travel allowances; if the Government support this request and if he will make a statement on the implication of this derogation for United Kingdom towns near the Irish border.

Mr. Lawson: At the meeting of the Internal Market Council on 18 December 1984, a compromise proposal to raise the value of both the intra-Community travel allowance and the Irish derogation was considered; but it was withdrawn in the face of opposition by certain Member States. The United Kingdom would have been prepared to agree to this proposal.

As regards the remainder of the Question I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 April last year at column *149*.

EC (Contributions)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the net amount to be contributed by the United Kingdom to the Common Market in 1985 and 1986 will compare with the net amount contributed in 1984 on the assumption that the resources of the EEC are increased in accordance with the Council of Ministers' recommendation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Taxation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish the latest estimates of the real change in taxes, rates and national insurance in 1984-85 compared with 1978-79 broken down *(a)* into the following categories: (i) income tax, (ii) corporation tax, (iii) North sea taxes, (iv) capital taxes and stamp duty, (v) national insurance contributions, employees (vi) national insurance contributions, employers, (vii) national insurance surcharge, (viii) local authority rates and (ix) taxes on expenditure; and *(b)* to show the division of changes in income tax between (i) taxes on investment income and (ii) taxes on those in the lower and upper deciles and in the four quartiles of tax units ranked by income.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 December 1984]: The available information is in the table. It is not possible to split the figure for the change in income tax revenue in the way requested.

1984-85 prices

	£ billion
Income tax	−0·3
Non-North sea corporation tax	−1·1
North sea taxes*	10·9
Capital taxes and stamp duty	0·3
National insurance contributions—employees	3·9
National insurance contributions—employers	0·8
National insurance surcharge	−3·0
Local authority rates	2·5
Taxes on expenditure	10·0
Total†	24·1

* Before advanced corporation tax set-off.
† Components do not sum to total because of rounding.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (Rent Arrears)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the published total of rent arrears due to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive includes sums deemed due in arrears on behalf of its tenants under arrangements with the social security authorities; and what proportion of the total arrears those sums represent.

Dr. Boyson: I understand from the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that about 4 per cent. (£800,000) of the total rent, rates and district heating arrears owed by tenants at 30 September 1984 was collected under current arrangements with the Department of Health and Social Services. It had not, however, been paid over to the Housing Executive at that date.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Medical Equipment and Aids (Overseas Sales)

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by the British Embassy in Paris to help United Kingdom manufacturers of medical equipment and aids for the handicapped to sell their products.

Mr. Rifkind: The embassy at Paris has been active in support of a task force on medical equipment and aids for the handicapped which was launched in October 1983 by the European trade committee, an area advisory group of the British Overseas Trade Board.

The embassy was involved in the organisation of an inward trade mission in March 1984, when representatives of five French health care organisations visited the United Kingdom for five days. In November, a presentation of medical equipment and aids for the handicapped manufactured by 10 British firms was mounted at the Paris residence of Her Majesty's ambassador. The British Health-Care Export Council and the participating firms consider the presentation to have been an outstanding success.

Exhibitions, China

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the staff of the commercial section in Peking visited the exhibitions in Tianjin, China, that took place from 29 November to 4 December.

Mr. Rifkind: Two members of the commercial department of Her Majesty's embassy, Peking attended the opening day (29 November) of the electric power and water exposition in Tianjin, China. They met the British exhibitors before the opening ceremony, attended the ceremony, escorted the Chinese dignitaries through the British stands and talked to the British exhibitors over lunch and in the afternoon at the exhibition. The commercial department of the embassy also assisted and briefed those exhibitors who contacted them at the embassy during or after the exhibition.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British companies exhibited at the energy exhibition in Tianjin, China, from 29 November to 4 December.

Mr. Rifkind: Nineteen British firms, including one major engineering company and five of its manufacturing subsidiaries, exhibited at the electric power and water exposition in Tianjin, China. Their participation was organised jointly by the Federation of British Electrotechnical and Allied Manufacturers' Associations and the British Overseas Trade Board.

Mr. E. Barlow (South African Sports Office)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's

Government have received any request for diplomatic status to be given to Mr. E. Barlow, the Director of the South African Sports Office.

Mr. Rifkind: No.

British Embassy, Peking

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of staff in the British Embassy in Peking; and how they are deployed.

Mr. Rifkind: There are 38 United Kingdom based staff and 47 locally engaged staff in the British Embassy in Peking. The breakdown by Department is:

Ambassador
Personal Assistant

Chancery
Counsellor
Two First Secretaries
One Second Secretary
One Second Secretary (also employed on information work)
Three secretarial staff
Two locally engaged staff

Commercial Department
Counsellor
First Secretary
Second Secretary
Attache
Three United Kingdom based support staff
One locally engaged officer

Commercial work in Southern China is covered by the China Trade Unit in the British Trade Commission in Hong Kong which is staffed by a First and Second Secretary with 1·5 locally engaged staff.

Economic Section
First Secretary

Information Section
See Chancery
One part-time locally engaged employee

Consular and Immigration Section
One First Secretary
One Attache
One United Kingdom based support staff
4·5 locally engaged staff

Science and Technology
Second Secretary

Administration, Communications and General Support
First Secretary
Attache
14 United Kingdom support staff
39 locally engaged staff

Soviet Union (Treaties and Agreements)

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what treaties and agreements have been signed with the Soviet Union since 1955.

Mr. Rifkind: The list of bilateral treaties and agreements between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union signed since 1955 is as follows:

Agreement	*Date of signature*
Agreement on Fisheries	25 May 1956
Agreement concerning Air Services	19 December 1957
Five-Year Trade Agreement	24 May 1959
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields 1960/1961	1 December 1959
Exchange of Notes amending the Air Services Agreement of 19 December 1957	3 & 29 March 1960
Exchange of Notes amending the Air Services Agreement of 19 December 1957	14 October 1960
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields 1961/1963	9 January 1961
Exchange of Notes concerning the Distribution in the Soviet Union of an English Magazine in the Russian Language	12 January 1961
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields 1963/1965	21 January 1963
Exchange of Notes concerning the Mutual Abolition of Consular Fees on Visas	13 April 1964
Protocol for the Prolongation of the Five-Year Trade Agreement	23 April 1964/ 23 June 1964
Exchange of Notes on Matters arising from the Establishment by the UK of the Fishery Regime provided for by the Fishery Limits Act 1964	30 September 1964
Agreed Minute on Co-operation in the Fields of Agricultural Research	6 January 1965
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1965/1967	13 February 1965
Consular Convention	2 December 1965
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1967/1969	24 February 1967
Agreement concerning the Establishment of a Direct Communication Link between the Residence of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in London and the Kremlin	25 August 1967
Agreement concerning the Settlement of Mutual Financial and Property Claims	6 January 1968
Agreement for Co-operation in the Fields of Applied Science and Technology	19 January 1968
Treaty on Merchant Navigation	3 April 1968
Exchange of Notes concerning the Abolition of Visas for Crew Members of BEA and Aeroflot Aircraft	14 & 15 August 1968
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1969/1971	28 March 1969
Long Term Trade Agreement	3 June 1969
Exchange of Notes amending the Air Services Agreement of 19 December 1957	11 February & 14 April 1969
Protocol supplementary to the Air Services Agreement signed at London on 19 December 1957	13 April 1970
Exchange of Notes concerning the Abolition of Visas for Crew Members of BEA, BOAC and Aeroflot Aircraft supplementary to the Agreement of 14 & 15 August 1968	7 July & 10 August 1970
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1971/1973	2 March 1971
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1973/1975	23 February 1973
Protocol on Jurisdiction supplementary to the 1968 Treaty on Merchant Navigation	1 March 1974
Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation of Air Transport Undertakings and their Employees	3 May 1974
Agreement on the Development of Economic, Scientific, Technological and Industrial Cooperation	6 May 1974
Agreement in the Field of Environmental Protection	21 May 1974
Exchange of Notes amending the Supplementary Protocol of 13 April 1970 to the Air Services Agreement of 19 December 1957 and the Agreements of 14 and 15 August 1968 and 7 July and 10 August 1970 on the Abolition of Visas for Air Crews	29 January & 21 March 1974

Agreement	Date of signature
Exchange of Notes revising the Schedule appended to the Agreed Minute on Co-operation in the Field of Agricultural Research signed on 6 January 1965	17 October 1974
Agreement on Co-operation in the Field of Medicine and Public Health	17 February 1975
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1975/1977	28 February 1975
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1977/1979	25 February 1977
Agreement on the Prevention of Accidental Nuclear War	10 October 1977
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1979/1981	1 March 1979
Exchange of Notes further amending the Agreement of 14 and 15 August 1968 concerning the Abolition of Visas for Crew Members of British Airways and Aeroflot	30 March 1979
Protocol supplementary to the Air Services Agreement signed at London on 19 December 1957	20 February 1981
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1981/83	23 March 1981
Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Fields for 1983/1985	3 March 1983

Falkland Islands (Fishing)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what notice he has been given by the Governments of *(a)* Japan and *(b)* Taiwan about fishing in 1985 in Falkland waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: No such notice has been received from either Government.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gallium Arsenide Microchips

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has and what consideration he is giving to assisting with the research and production of gallium arsenide microchips.

Mr. Butcher: Government assistance for research and development and production investment of gallium arsenide integrated circuits has been provided for under the microelectronics industry support programme 2.

The majority of the market for integrated circuits will continue to be satisfied by silicon devices which, accordingly, remain the major priority for assistance under MISP 2. However, because of the importance of the high speed and optical properties of integrated circuits made from gallium arsenide and similar materials, assistance has been earmarked for projects in this area.

Proposals for assistance have been received from three companies and several more are expected.

Support is also being given for research and development in this broad area through the joint opto-electronics research scheme and, indirectly, the ESPRIT programme.

Manufacturing

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how he defines productivity in manufacturing industry; and what statistics are used to assess changes in such productivity.

Mr. Butcher: The definitions of productivity in manufacturing refer only to labour productivity. This is defined as either output per person, in which manufacturing output is divided by the employed labour force in manufacturing, or output per person hour in which an adjustment is made for the number of hours worked. Statistics are readily available for productivity on both definitions. Further information is available in the CSO occasional paper "Output Per Person Hour in Manufacturing" (CSO output measures occasional paper number 15). A copy of this publication is in the Library of the House.

Astronomy Satellite

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the meeting of the Minister of State for Information Technology and James Beggs, Director of National Aeronautics and Space Administration, in relation to the future of IRAS, and possible participation in the European infra-red space observatory in 1992.

Mr. Butcher: Mr. Beggs was in the United Kingdom only briefly on 13 and 14 December to present NASA awards in connection with the very successful infra-red astronomy satellite mission. Mr. Beggs then had a short social meeting with my hon. Friend. Their discussion touched on a number of space matters, including possible British participation in the international space station programme but not the particular science projects referred to by the hon. Member. My hon. Friend hopes to meet Mr. Beggs again in Washington later this month.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Local Office Staffs

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the ratio of staff to work load in his Department's offices at Saxon house, East Newcastle and the Green, Wallsend, by year over the past 10 years; and if he will give the total staffing figures for the past 10 years, by year, and the annual number of claimants.

Mr. Whitney: The Departmental local office complementing system — a guide to which is in the Library—provides for the determination of local office complements, that is the number of staff required to deal with the estimated continuing work load, and their adjustment as work load levels change.

I regret that statistics in the form requested on the number of claimants over the last 10 years at the local offices mentioned could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In addition, comparison between numbers of staff and claimants would be misleading as workloads vary considerably by type and duration of claim and the action that has to be taken. All these factors vary over time and as a result of legislative, policy and procedural changes.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice is given to examining medical officers on the virtually-unable-to-walk eligibility requirement for mobility allowance.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on 21 November at column *203*.

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaf-blind people are currently in receipt of mobility allowance; how many have appealed after an initial refusal; how many have succeeded on appeal; and what are these figures on geographical basis.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost of extending mobility allowance to *(a)* all deaf-blind people and *(b)* deaf-blind people between the ages of five and 65 years.

Mr. Newton: I regret that information on which to base an estimate is not available.

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the Oglesby report, he is looking at ways in which medical reports on mobility allowance claims could be simplified and used by the claimant's own doctor.

Mr. Newton: We are still considering this recommendation.

Deaf-blind People

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are deaf-blind; and how many are aged between five and 65 years.

Mr. Newton: As at 31 March 1982, the latest date for which information is centrally available, the number of people in England registered as blind and deaf was as follows:

Age	*Number*
Under 5	2
5-64	351
65 and over	1,510
Total	1,863

Benefits Reviews

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects the reviews being undertaken on pensions, housing benefit and supplementary benefit to be completed.

Mr. Newton: We will be publishing our conclusions and proposals for change as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Back Pain and Injury

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why back pain and back injury are not included as a prescribed disease in the industrial injury provision of the Social Services Act 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: In its review of the schedule of prescribed industrial diseases (Cmnd. 8393) the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council concluded that prescription would not be appropriate for back pain since this was a symptom rather than a specific clinical condition or an effect of exposure to certain substances. Claims in respect of back pain and back injury may, however, be successful under the accident provisions of the industrial injuries scheme.

Industrial Injury Benefit Scheme Claims

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many industrial injury benefit scheme claims have been received by his Department in each of the last five years from National Health Service employees; and of these how many were successful.

Mr. Newton: I regret this information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Striking Miners (Benefits)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, in comparable terms, what are the levels of supplementary benefit presently allocated to the families of striking miners; and what were the levels paid in similar circumstances in 1974.

Mr. Newton: Levels of supplementary benefit payable for the families of strikers depend on individual circumstances, taking account of any other family income. The rules which apply to such payments have changed since 1974 and it is not possible to provide figures showing amounts of benefit paid in exactly comparable terms. One of the main changes is that help with rent and rates is now provided by a separate housing benefit, whereas in 1974 housing costs were covered by supplementary benefit. Another major change, since 1980, is that a specified sum (currently £16) is now deducted from the supplementary benefit requirements of families of strikers.

For illustrative purposes, some examples of supplementary benefit scale-rates which applied to strikers' families in 1974 and their equivalents at the present time are shown in the table. Housing requirements have been excluded and the £16 specified sum has been deducted from the 1984 figures.

	February 1974 scale-rates £	*February 1974* scale-rates at 1984 values* £	*November 1984† scale-rates less specified sum* £
Wife only	5·70	19·49	6·45
Wife plus one child under five years	7·75	26·51	16·05
Wife plus two children aged 11 years and 15 years	12·40	42·41	35·15

* Amounts increased in line with increases in the Retail Price Index (less housing costs) from February 1974 to November 1984.
† Scale-rates effect from 26 November 1984 after deduction of the £16 specified sum.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps were taken by his Department to enforce the requirement that recipients of attendance allowances notify his Department when they move from private accommodation to residential accommodation which is provided by or with the help of a public or local authority.

Mr. Newton: A claimant who fails to notify the Department of a change of circumstances which affects his entitlement to attendance allowance may be liable to prosecution and, subject to the decision of the adjudication authorities, be required to repay any sums to which he is found not to have been entitled.

Veterinary Waste Disposal

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what investigations have been conducted by his Department into the health hazards arising from haphazard veterinary waste disposal methods.

Mr. John Patten: None, but the problem of veterinary waste disposal is discussed in waste management paper No. 25 "Clinical Waste", published in 1983 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Hospitals (Energy Consumption)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific guidelines he has issued to hospitals about energy consumption during the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: During the last three years, the Department has issued guidelines to health authorities on a number of energy conservation measures including recovering waste heat from incinerators and in laundries, minimising heat losses in hot water systems, energy management systems, replacement of inefficient boilers, thermal insulation of buildings and appropriate engineering services, small-scale combined heat and power plants and checks on energy saving effectiveness. A computer program has been made available for making decisions locally, when planning long-term investment in energy saving measures.

Regional health authorities have been provided with an analysis of the energy consumed in their districts over a seven year period ending 1981-82, together with the national average figures to assist them in their monitoring role.

The Department is working with the relevant regional health authorities on the development of low energy hospitals on the Isle of Wight and at Ashington, Northumberland, from which lessons can be learned for more general application.

Benefits

Ms. Clare Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the costs of supplementary benefit, housing benefit and unemployment benefit to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Newton: Approximate, estimated expenditure for 16 and 17-year-olds in 1983-84 was as follows:

	£ million
Supplementary benefit*	200
Housing benefit	10
Unemployment benefit	17

*Based on provisional figures.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total amount of benefit claimed by, and in respect of, unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds; and how that amount is distributed between the various classes of claim.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 January, c. *506*]: Estimated total benefit expenditure on unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds in 1983-84 was £225 million (rounded). This breaks down approximately as follows:

	£ million
Supplementary benefit*	185
Unemployment benefit	17
Housing benefit	10
Child benefit	15

*Based on provisional figures.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 70**

SESSION 1984-85

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speakers ruling and statement'.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading 'Speaker'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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